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**The Pitt Press Shakespeare for Schools**

**HAMLET**

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SHAKESPEARE

HAMLET

EDITED BY  
A. W. VERITY

*Cambridge*



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## NOTE.

THIS edition is, in the main, an abbreviation of the fuller one edited by me (1904) for the Cambridge University Press. If I repeat the prefatory Note to that edition I hope that I shall have made an adequate statement of my debt to others:

“It is my pleasure once more to record my great indebtedness to Dr Furness. The letter ‘F’ at the end of a paragraph means that the note is based entirely or mainly on materials quoted by Dr Furness from other editions, not that it represents necessarily his own views. But it would be impossible to specify all my obligations to him, and I wish, therefore, this general acknowledgment to be as full and emphatic as words can make it. I must also make special mention of the editions of Professors Dowden and Herford. I have, of course, drawn freely on standard works such as Schmidt’s *Lexicon*. The Indexes were compiled for me by one of the readers of the Press.”

In a few places the acknowledgment made in the large edition has been omitted here, for the sake of brevity. I must add that I have had since 1904 the great advantage of reading Professor Bradley’s *Shakespearean Tragedy*, and have drawn on it more than once.

A. W. V.

March, 1911.

*M. M. M.*



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## INTRODUCTION.

## I.

THE EARLY EDITIONS<sup>1</sup> OF "HAMLET."

THE text of *Hamlet* rests on two authorities—a Quarto edition published in 1604, and the First Folio<sup>2</sup> (1623). The title-page of the former is important. It runs :

"THE Tragicall Historie of HAMLET, *Prince of Denmarke*. By William Shakespeare. Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie. AT LONDON, Printed by I. R. for N. L., and are to be sold at his shoppe under Saint Dunstons Church in Fleetstreet. 1604."

It has been estimated that the Quarto has about 220 lines which are absent from the Folio, and the Folio about 85 which are not in the Quarto. Of the two versions, that in the Folio reveals more clearly the stage-influence. Thus not a few of

<sup>1</sup> The materials of this section are taken from various sources.

<sup>2</sup> The first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays, and the earliest authority for the text of the majority, e.g. *As You Like It*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Macbeth*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Coriolanus*, *The Tempest*. But for the First Folio (often referred to simply as "The Folio") these plays would, no doubt, have been lost. Of only sixteen of the plays are there extant Quarto editions, and these were all "publishers' ventures... undertaken without the co-operation of the author" (Lee). The Second Folio (1632) was a reprint of the First, correcting some of its typographical errors, and introducing some conjectural changes which are often quite unnecessary. The two later Folios have little value or interest, except that the edition of 1664 was the first to give *Pericles*.



the omissions from the Folio were obviously made because the passages deleted are of a philosophic character, difficult for a popular audience to grasp, and do not contribute to the dramatic movement of the tragedy. Compare, for example, the excision from the Folio of almost all the Fortinbras-scene (IV. 4), of the famous "dram of eale" passage (I. 4), and of the King's analysis of the transitoriness of passion (IV. 7. 114—123). The text, then, of the Folio is "more theatrical, but less literary<sup>1</sup>," than the text of the Quarto of 1604. But combined they give us our present *Hamlet*.

The title-page of the Quarto of 1604 is important because it implies that there had been an earlier edition, and reflects adversely on that edition. The earlier edition was a Quarto issued in 1603, with the title-page :

"The Tragicall Historie of HAMLET *Prince of Denmarke*. By William Shake-speare. As it hath beene diuerse times acted by his Highnesse seruants in the Cittie of London : as also in the two Vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford, and elsewhere. At London printed for N: L. and John Trundell. 1603."

The history of this First Quarto (1603) of *Hamlet*, and its relation to the Second Quarto (1604), form an insoluble problem, on which something must be said later. Here we need only note that the First Quarto is about half the length of the Second Quarto, presents innumerable and far-reaching variations from it, and was unquestionably an unauthorised and grossly imperfect edition.

Such was the popularity of *Hamlet* that the Second Quarto was reprinted in 1605, and again in 1611 ; while before the close of the century four other Quartos of the play had appeared, besides the four Folio editions (1623, 1632, 1664, 1685).

<sup>1</sup> Speaking of the First Folio in general, Mr Lee says : " There is no doubt that the whole volume was printed from the acting versions in the possession of the manager of the company with which Shakespeare had been associated."



## II.

✓ DATE OF THE COMPOSITION OF "HAMLET."

Under the date July 26, 1602, the Stationers' Register has the entry :

"A Booke called '*the Revenge of HAMLETT Prince of Denmarke as yt was latelie Acted by the Lord Chamberleyne his servantes.*'"

This "Booke" was undoubtedly Shakespeare's tragedy ; the tragedy, that is, of which the First Quarto gives us so corrupt a version. He belonged to the Lord Chamberlain's company of actors, who on the accession of James I. in 1603 were raised to the dignity of "The King's Players." Compare the description of *Hamlet* on the title-page of the Quarto of 1603 as having "beene diuerse timis acted by his Highnesse seruants."

The date—July 26, 1602—of the entry of *Hamlet* on the Stationers' Register fixes the limit of the date of composition in one direction. In the other direction the absence of *Hamlet* from the list of Shakespeare's tragedies given by Meres in *Palladis Tamia* is, practically, a proof that it was not written before 1598. Within the limits thus defined, the period 1601 (late) or 1602 (early) may be accepted with conviction. It coincides with the entry of *Hamlet* on the Register. It places *Hamlet* just after the group of "middle" comedies, in close relation to the tragedy *Julius Cæsar*, which anticipates *Hamlet* in several<sup>1</sup> ways. It harmonises with the general characteristics of style, metre and deepening gloom that mark the commencement of the great tragic period. And it fits, with nice precision, the unquestionable contemporary allusion that underlies the passage about the Players (II. 2. 318—347). For the controversy<sup>2</sup> alluded to was in full career in 1601—1602, and there is some ground for thinking that towards the end of 1601 Shakespeare's own company "travelled" in the provinces.

<sup>1</sup> "Brutus becomes Hamlet.... Hamlet has, so to speak, just seen what happened to Brutus"—*Brandes*.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 229, 230.



Of the two years I think that 1602 is the more probable date. It corresponds more closely with the entry of *Hamlet* on the Stationers' Register, as "latelie Acted<sup>1</sup>" (i.e. for the first time). Again, in seeking to determine closely the date of a particular play where certain limits in either direction are fixed by satisfactory evidence, account must always be taken of other plays known or supposed to have been also written within or nearly within those limits. Now *Twelfth Night*, the last of the joyous comedies, and *Julius Cæsar*, the first of the later tragedies, both date from 1600—1601; while 1603 claims *Troilus and Cressida*. To the intervening year no other play than *Hamlet* seems assignable. This, therefore, is a second, and a sound, argument in favour of 1602.

Whether the *Hamlet* written at this date, and entered on the Stationers' Register in July, 1602, was *substantially* the *Hamlet* of the Second Quarto and Folio, our present *Hamlet*; or only a first draft, retaining (some think) parts of a pre-Shakespearian Hamlet-play, and subsequently recast and expanded: this question depends really upon the relation of the First Quarto to the Second<sup>2</sup>. Personally I hold it correct to say that the tragedy as we have it *was* written substantially in 1602.

### III.

#### THE HAMLET-STORY.

Emerson's Essay on Shakespeare begins with the significant words: "Great men are more distinguished by range and extent, than by originality." It is one of the commonplaces of criticism that Shakespeare's works are not remarkable for originality of plot and incident. There are, indeed, only two or three of which some original has not been discovered. Delineation of character, with the treatment of incident as a medium of characterisation, is primarily what constitutes his supremacy. And no play exemplifies these considerations more strikingly than

<sup>1</sup> "Its success on the stage led to the play's publication immediately afterwards"—*Lee*.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. liii—lviii.



*Hamlet*. For here we have old-world legend touched anew to the highest issues.

"The story of Hamlet is told in the *Historia Danica* of Saxo Grammaticus<sup>1</sup>, who wrote about 1180—1208. It appeared in French prose in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, 1570. The only extant English translation [from the French], *The Historie of Hamblet*, dates from 1608, but there may have been earlier versions, now lost. The tale in its original form is thoroughly characteristic of the age<sup>2</sup> and country that gave it birth. It belongs to that Anglo-Danish cycle of legends, of which *King Horn* is a specimen, which celebrates the prowess of a national hero. ✓ Hamlet's father Horwendil is murdered by his brother Fengo, who seizes the throne and marries his victim's widow, Gerutha. The Prince, summoned to revenge by his father's ghost, feigns madness and is narrowly watched by his uncle and a courtier. The murder of this courtier by mischance, Hamlet's voyage to England, and the death of his companions, follow as in the drama, but the original version then takes a quite independent course. Hamlet marries in England the king's daughter and returns to Denmark, where he kills his uncle and is chosen king in his stead. He then visits England again, where he marries two wives, by one of whom he is finally betrayed to his doom" (Boas).

Such in outline is the Hamlet-story in the earliest connected form known to us. The play's general relation to it will be apparent at once. Some specific features of resemblance may be filled in further.

"Horvendil's son, Amleth, determines to disarm Fengo's malevolence by feigning madness. In order to test whether he is really mad, a beautiful girl is thrown in his way, who is

<sup>1</sup> "The Lettered."

<sup>2</sup> Note that it is pre-Christian; Shakespeare changes this (see I. 2. 132, note). Hints survive in Scandinavian literature of a much earlier legend of Amleth (= Hamlet). "There is an allusion to Hamlet in Icelandic literature some two hundred years before Saxo; and to this day, '*Amløthe*' (i.e. *Hamlet*) is synonymous with 'fool' among the folk there"—*Gollancz*.



to note whether, in his passion for her, he still maintains the appearance of madness. But a foster-brother and friend of Amleth's reveals the plot to him; the girl, too, has an old affection for him; and nothing is discovered. Here lie the germs of Ophelia and Horatio....

"Polonius, too, is here already indicated—especially the scene in which he plays eavesdropper to Hamlet's conversation with his mother. One of the King's friends proposes that some one shall conceal himself in the Queen's chamber. Amleth runs his sword through him, and throws the dismembered body to the pigs, as Hamlet in the play drags the body out with him. Then ensues Amleth's speech of reproach to his mother"—which in its purport resembles the speech assigned to Shakespeare's Hamlet.

"One more little touch is, as it were, led up to in Saxo: the exchange of the swords. Amleth, on his return, finds the King's men assembled at his own funeral feast. He goes around with a drawn sword, and on trying its edge against his nails he once or twice cuts himself with it. Therefore they nail his sword fast into its sheath. When Amleth has set fire to the hall and rushes into Fengo's chamber to murder him, he takes the King's sword from its hook and replaces it with his own, which the King in vain attempts to draw before he dies" (Brandes).

The legend has no prototypes of Laertes and Fortinbras, whom Shakespeare added as opposites to Hamlet.

Now this Hamlet-story in its bare original is, we see, merely a primitive tale of revenge; a chronicle of the typical deeds of a Northern blood-feud, based on local tradition but influenced greatly by Saxo's familiarity with the classical story of the "madness" of Lucius Junius Brutus, the expeller of the Tarquins from Rome. It is the miracle of Shakespeare's achievement in *Hamlet* that he has transformed such material into a work of enduring and universal appeal. This transformation of the theme is effected through the characterisation of Hamlet himself; through the development, that is, of the simple into the complex. For the Hamlet of the old story is a straightforward character, marked by bravery, and by wit in assuming madness



and keeping up the pretence ; " quite sane and quite resolute," and we know it. But Shakespeare's Hamlet does not admit of these or any other neat definitions !

## IV.

## THE OLD HAMLET-PLAY.

The story, then, of *Hamlet* was not new, nor was Shakespeare the first to dramatise it. A Hamlet-play—not Shakespeare's, it is agreed on all hands—was in existence as early as 1589. This is proved by the oft-quoted allusion in Nash's "Epistle to the Gentlemen Students of Both Universities," prefixed to Greene's *Menaphon*, published in 1589. Referring to contemporary playwrights, Nash says :

"He turne backe to my first text, of studies of delight, and talke a little in friendship with a few of our triviall translators. It is a common practice now a daies amongst a sort of shifting companions, that runne through every arte and thrive by none to leave the trade of *Noverint* whereto they were borne, and busie themselves with the indevours of art, that could scarcely latinize their necke-verse if they should have neede ; yet English Seneca<sup>1</sup> read by candle-light yeeldes manie good sentences, as *Bloud is a begger*, and so foorth : and if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets*, I should say Handfulls of tragical speaches. But O grief! *Tempus edax rerum* ;—what is it that will last always? The sea exhaled by drops will in continuance be drie ; and Seneca, let bloud line by line, and page by page, at length must needs die to our stage : which makes his famisht followers to imitate the Kidde in *Æsop*, who enamored with the Foxes newfangles, forsooke all hopes of life to leape into a new occupation, and these men renouncing all possibilities of credit or estimation, to intermeddle with Italian translations," etc.

This passage proves the existence in 1589 of a play on the subject of Hamlet and indicates its character ; that it owed much to the Senecan drama, and belonged in style to the

<sup>1</sup> Alluding to the English translations of Seneca ; see p. 231.



old-fashioned rhetorical type of tragedy exemplified in the Player's speech (*Hamlet*, II. 2. 431—498). It is, no doubt, the play referred to, under the date June 9, 1594, in the *Diary* of the theatrical manager Henslowe, and in a pamphlet by Lodge, entitled *Wits miserie, and the Worlds madnesse, discovering the Devils incarnate of this Age* (1596). One of these evil spirits, says Lodge, is "Hate-Virtue, a foul lubber," who "looks as pale as the visard of y<sup>e</sup> Ghost, which cried so miserably at y<sup>e</sup> theator, like an oisterwife, *Hamlet reuenge*." This last allusion gives us further insight into the character of the play; true to its Senecan inspiration mentioned by Nash, it contained a Ghost, and its leading motive was revenge. Indeed, the Ghost's appeal for revenge furnished the stage with a popular catchword. "My name's Hamlet reuenge," says someone ironically in Dekker's *Satiro-mastix* (1602). The allusion survived long after the old play was itself displaced by Shakespeare's. It is found in the comedy of *Westward Ho* (1607), and even as late as 1618. There is an echo of this element—evidently the element of the old tragedy that had most impressed the imagination of playgoers—in the title of Shakespeare's own tragedy as entered on the Stationers' Register. The revenge-motive and the supernatural machinery of its execution were favourite features of early Elizabethan tragedy.

Who wrote this original play of *Hamlet*? The old theory that Shakespeare was the author at whom Nash directed his satire in the passage of his Epistle quoted above, and that the *Hamlet* there referred to was an early sketch of his tragedy, involves insuperable difficulties, into which we need not enter.

The theory which now holds the field is that the dramatist Thomas Kyd wrote the *Hamlet* mentioned in these allusions that preceded the publication of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in 1603.

That the passage in Nash's Epistle is singularly applicable to Kyd has been shown conclusively<sup>1</sup>. No doubt, it was prompted by jealousy of the favour accorded to Kyd's tragedies,

<sup>1</sup> The allusion to "the *Kidde* in *Æsop*" is, no doubt, a pun, like Ben Jonson's probably ironical description of the dramatist as "*sporting*"



especially *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587—1588), probably the most popular of all pre-Shakespearian plays, as numberless contemporary allusions show. What Nash says of the sententiousness and “tragical speeches” of the old *Hamlet* may be said, with equal appropriateness, of the works of Kyd, whose models were Seneca and Marlowe<sup>1</sup>. From Lodge’s allusion we have inferred that two of the prominent features of the old *Hamlet* were the revenge-motive and the supernatural machinery: these features are characteristic of Kyd. He was a master of that “tragedy of blood” in which Elizabethan audiences delighted chiefly up to the advent of Shakespeare, and the *Hamlet*-story presented exceptional scope for the gratification of this taste. Further, *The Spanish Tragedy* presents a strong resemblance to Shakespeare’s own *Hamlet* in two points. Its main theme is an inversion of the situation in Shakespeare’s tragedy, the character (Hieronimo) on whom lies the duty of revenge—a duty tardily discharged after much self-reproach—being the father, not son, of the victim; while the means by which his vengeance is ultimately executed is a Play within the play. Finally, the version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the First Quarto, commonly supposed to preserve traces at least of the older play, has some similarities of phrase and sentiment to Kyd’s pieces, especially to *The Spanish Tragedy*. The twofold conclusion, therefore, that a *Hamlet*-tragedy preceded Shakespeare’s, and that its author was Thomas Kyd is, to my mind, a conjecture as convincing as a certainty.

One more point connected with the genesis of *Hamlet* remains to be noted. There is a German tragedy entitled *Der Bestrafte Brudermord oder Prinz Hamlet Aus Dænmark* = *Fratricide Punished or Hamlet of Denmark*. This piece belonged to the repertory of one of the companies of “English Comedians” who travelled in Germany and Denmark towards the close of the sixteenth and during the first half of the seventeenth centuries, acting at the various courts and in the

<sup>1</sup> “From Seneca he [Kyd] borrows ghosts and ‘sentences’; Marlowe provides him with precedents of rant and bloodshed” (and the example of blank verse)—*Courthope*.



chief cities, sometimes in English, sometimes in combination with German players. The date of the original composition of *Fratricide Punished* cannot be determined. It survives in a modernised version dated October, 1710. But the play is proved to have been acted at Dresden in 1626, and is commonly supposed to date back much further. At any rate, *Fratricide Punished* belongs to the *Hamlet*-period, and apart from the interest of its general resemblance to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, claims notice for two reasons. It opens with an explanatory Prologue such as Kyd, following the example of Seneca, prefixed to *The Spanish Tragedy*; and there is much plausibility in the conjecture that a similar prelude<sup>1</sup> commenced the old *Hamlet*-play and is reproduced to some extent in the Prologue to the German tragedy. Again, the "Court Chamberlain" of *Fratricide Punished*—the "Corambis"<sup>2</sup> of the 1603 Quarto of *Hamlet* and "Polonius" of the 1604 Quarto—is called "Corambus." This fact brings *Fratricide Punished* into close relation with the *Hamlet* of the 1603 Quarto.

On the whole, the German play seems to be a composite piece of work; put together, probably, in a very summary fashion by one of the "English Comedians" from the First Quarto of Shakespeare's tragedy, translated by a German actor or writer who added fresh elements in the later scenes (where the German play diverges considerably from the English), and supplemented afterwards by actors familiar with the full version of *Hamlet* as given in the 1604 Quarto.

## V.

✓  
THE SOURCES OF "HAMLET."

[It follows from what has been said above, that in my opinion the real source of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is Kyd's play. Here, one may fairly assume, he found the general outline of

<sup>1</sup> If there were a Prologue to the old *Hamlet*, no doubt, it gave the audience, in brief, the information conveyed in the Ghost's speech to Hamlet, and foreshadowed Hamlet's revenge (Furness, I. pp. 114—120).

<sup>2</sup> See p. lv.



the legend: the Ghost, elaborated by Kyd from Saxo's reference to it (there is no Ghost in Belleforest); and (if we may judge by the parallel case of Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* and his final plan of revenge) the hint of Hamlet's procrastination, the device of the Play within the play, and the death of the hero.

Whether Shakespeare drew on any other source cannot be determined. The Hamlet-story, freely rendered from Saxo's *Historia*, is (as we have seen) among the *Histoires Tragiques* of Belleforest, a famous collection of tales that passed through many editions. Of the English *Hystorie of Hamblet*, closely translated from the French, the earliest known edition, extant in a single copy, dates from 1608; but others may have preceded it. As published in 1608 the *Hystorie* certainly seems in one or two<sup>1</sup> places to reflect the influence of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Moreover, it is curious that a single tale should have been chosen for separate translation, unless there were something special to draw attention to that particular story. Hence, the balance of probability is that the *Hystorie* followed Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and was due to the continued popularity of the tragedy. In any case, Shakespeare had a competent knowledge of French and may well have read the story in Belleforest's *Histoires*; or, indeed, in Saxo's *Historia* (the original of Belleforest's version). The story has been characterised as "certainly the most striking of all Saxo's mythical hero-stories," and is said to have been well known throughout Northern Europe in the 15th century, "trolled far and wide in popular song."

Now, while it is proper always to recognise Shakespeare's obligations where they exist, we must be very careful not to over-estimate them. The word "source" or "original" will mislead us unless we ask ourselves what constitutes the greatness of his plays, and consider how little that greatness is due to any nominal sources: how such qualities as characterisation

<sup>1</sup> e.g. "the English translator makes Amleth exclaim in the very words of Shakespeare: 'A rat! a rat!' whereof not a trace is to be found in Belleforest."



(ever the crown of the dramatist's art), humour and wit, poetry and pathos and tragic intensity, deft manipulation of plot and underplot and varied relief, are Shakespeare's own gift, never the inspiration of another. This is in truth a vital point, and on it Dr Furness has some valuable remarks, written indeed with reference to the tragedies, more particularly *King Lear*, but applicable (*mutatis mutandis*) to Shakespeare's plays in general.

"What false impressions are conveyed in the phrases which we have to use to express the process whereby Shakespeare converted the stocks and stones of the old dramas and chronicles into living, breathing men and women! We say 'he drew his original' from this source, or he 'found his materials' in that source. But how much did he 'draw,' or what did he 'find'? Granting that he drew from Holinshed, or whence you please, where did he find Lear's madness, or the pudder of the elements, or the inspired babblings of the Fool? Of whatsoever makes his tragedies sublime and heaven-high above all other human compositions,—of that we find never a trace....When, after reading one of his tragedies, we turn to what we are pleased to call the 'original of his plot,' I am reminded of those glittering gems, of which Heine speaks, that we see at night in lovely gardens, and think must have been left there by kings' children at play, but when we look for these jewels by day we see only wretched little worms which crawl painfully away, and which the foot forbears to crush only out of strange pity."

Further, we must recognise as a simple fact of literary history that Elizabethan feeling on the subject of originality and *invention* of plot was not the modern feeling. The accepted practice then was that of Molière's maxim: "*je prends mon bien où je le trouve*"; of Emerson's aphorism: "the greatest genius is the most indebted man." In this respect Shakespeare was conditioned by the feeling of his own age. His position is that of the Greek tragedians. He dealt with existing material of drama—whether an English chronicle, or a French collection of tales, or an old play, or a Euphuist romance—much as they dealt with the cycles of Greek national myth; and exercising



the same sovereign liberty of appropriation, he turned it to the same inspired account.

## VI.

THE SCENE AND DRAMATIC TIME OF ACTION.

"In popular tradition," says Mr Elton, "Amleth was a Jutlander." No doubt, the transference of the scene of the Hamlet-story from Jutland (the peninsula of Denmark) to Elsinore<sup>1</sup>, whether made by Kyd or Shakespeare, was due to the information about Elsinore, and its great castle, brought back by the English players who had acted there in 1585—1587. Most modern editions give "Elsinore" alone as the designation in general of the "Scene" of the action of *Hamlet*. One scene (IV. 4), however, of the play must be laid in "A plain in Denmark"; so that "Elsinore," without some qualification, is not an absolutely correct description of the *locale*. The "Globe" edition of Shakespeare has "Scene: *Denmark*" for the general description; and this, on the whole, seems best.

The events of *Hamlet* may be supposed to take place in about eight days, distributed over a period that may be estimated at about four months<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The following is a brief modern account: "Elsinore (Dan. Helsingör), a seaport of Denmark in the *amt* (county) of Frederiksborg, on the east coast of the island of Zealand, 28 miles north of Copenhagen by rail. It stands at the narrowest part of the Sound, opposite the Swedish town of Helsingborg, 3 miles distant...It is celebrated as the Elsinore of Shakespeare's Tragedy of *Hamlet*, and was the birthplace of Saxo Grammaticus, from whose history the story of Hamlet is derived. ...On a tongue of land east of the town stands the castle of Kronberg or Kronenberg, a magnificent, solid and venerable Gothic structure built by Frederick II. towards the end of the 16th century." Campbell mentions Elsinore in his *Battle of the Baltic*, VII.

<sup>2</sup> The clearest time-reference is Ophelia's "'tis twice two months" (III. 2. 119), compared with Hamlet's "But two months dead" (I. 2. 138). Hamlet has let two months go by since his interview with the Ghost. The interview covers the embassy to Norway and the proceedings connected with it.



## VII.

LOCAL COLOUR IN "HAMLET."

One of the points in which the Elizabethan drama, taken as a whole, may be said, I think, to differ from modern drama and fiction is the comparative slightness of its "local colour." Elizabethan writers are not at such pains as their successors to suggest the natural and social surroundings in which the action of their works is laid. The rendering of environment and atmosphere, of customs and manners, seems incidental rather than designed and systematic. Nor is this to be wondered at; for the ill-equipped Elizabethan stage had practically no means of translating descriptive or allusive touches into visual reality. At the same time, Shakespeare's art does not by any means ignore this aid to illusion. His Italian plays show considerable knowledge of Italian life and national characteristics. The two Venetian pieces in particular—*The Merchant of Venice*<sup>1</sup> and *Othello*—contain several intimate hints of familiarity. *Macbeth*<sup>2</sup> again is penetrated with suggestions of a desolate northern landscape and with the fierce, weird spirit of Celtic Scotland. It has been argued, indeed, that Shakespeare must himself have been in Italy and Scotland, that he painted from the life, from personal observation and memory. Probably, however, he was never out of England, nor need we assume other resources than his all-embracing sympathy and an imagination which enabled him to realise and harmonise into a vivid whole the miscellaneous information that could be derived from books and association with travellers.

As in the Italian plays, and the tragedy of Scottish legend, so in this Danish tragedy there is an appreciable element of "local colour," gained, no doubt, from some of Shakespeare's fellow-actors who had performed in Denmark.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix to *The Merchant of Venice*, pp. 171—175.

<sup>2</sup> See the "Student's Edition," pp. xxiv—xxvi.



"Hamlet being a Dane and his destiny being acted out in distant Denmark—a name not yet so familiar in England as it was soon to be, when, with the new King, a Danish princess<sup>1</sup> came to the throne—Shakespeare would naturally seize whatever opportunities lay in his way of gathering intelligence as to the manners and customs of this little-known country.

"In the year 1585 a troupe of English players had appeared in the courtyard of the Town-hall of Elsinore. If we are justified in assuming this troupe to have been the same which we find in the following year established at the Danish Court, it numbered among its members three persons who, at the time when Shakespeare was turning over in his mind the idea of *Hamlet*, belonged to his company of actors, and probably to his most intimate circle: namely, William Kemp, George Bryan, and Thomas Pope<sup>2</sup>....It was evidently from these comrades of his, and perhaps also from other English actors who, under the management of Thomas Sackville, had performed at Copenhagen in 1596 at the coronation of Christian IV., that Shakespeare gathered information on several matters relating to Denmark.

"First and foremost, he picked up some Danish names, which we find, indeed, mutilated by the printers in the different [original] texts of *Hamlet*, but which are easily recognisable<sup>3</sup>." Thus *Rosencrantz* is clearly the name of the ancient Danish family of *Rosenkrans*. An ambassador of this name—some, however, say a Danish nobleman in the suite of the ambassador—came to England as representative of Denmark at the accession of James. In *Guildestern* we recognise the Danish *Gyldenstjerne*. Two statesmen bearing these names were colleagues, it is said, in the Danish Council of Regency during the minority

<sup>1</sup> Anne of Denmark, married to James VI. of Scotland, in 1589. Fleay notes that it was, doubtless, out of compliment to her that Hamlet's description of Denmark as "a prison"—"one o' the worst" dungeons in that prison the world—is omitted from the Quarto of 1604.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan and Pope are mentioned in the list of actors of Shakespeare's plays prefixed to the First Folio.

<sup>3</sup> Brandes.



of Christian IV. Then "the names given [in the old texts of *Hamlet*] to the ambassador, *Voltemar*, *Voltemand*, *Valtemand*, are so many corruptions of the Danish *Valdemar*."

Doubtless, too, "it is in consequence of what he had learnt from his comrades that Shakespeare has transferred the action of *Hamlet* from Jutland to Elsinore, which they had visited and no doubt described to him. That is how he comes to know of the Castle at Elsinore (finished about a score of years earlier), though he does not mention the name Kronborg. The scene in which Polonius listens behind the arras, and in which Hamlet, in reproaching the Queen, points to the portraits of the late and present King, has even been regarded as proving that Shakespeare knew something of the interior of the Castle." For Hamlet's words seem to indicate full-sized portraits hanging on the wall, and a contemporary description of the Castle of Kronborg mentions that the "great chamber" "is hanged with Tapistary of fresh coloured silke without golde, wherein all the Danish Kings are exprest in antique habits" (i.e. dress). However, the theory is rather forced, and we may credit Shakespeare's own imagination with the responsibility of attributing family portraits to a palace.

On the other hand, it can hardly be by accident that the University of which Hamlet and Horatio are students is Wittenberg, the favourite University, from its Lutheran sympathies, of the Danes. Curiously enough, an English traveller records that when he studied at Wittenberg, 1591—1592, there was then a Danish prince, Ulric, the younger brother of Christian IV. of Denmark, at the University. "And it is quite certain that when, in the first and fifth Acts, Shakespeare makes trumpet-blasts and the firing of cannon accompany the healths which are drunk, he must have known that this was a specially Danish custom, and have tried to give his play local colour by introducing it."

Moreover, some emphasis is laid in *Hamlet* on intemperate drinking as a national vice of the Danes, and there is abundant evidence that this was a common charge against them in Shakespeare's time.



transcends all limits of space and time. It appeals to all civilised races, and its appeal is undying. Rather, we should say that time has but intensified the force of its appeal, by revealing the inwardness and reach of this tragedy wherein Shakespeare's "prophetic soul, dreaming on things to come<sup>1</sup>," passed beyond the ken of his contemporaries and spoke to the fuller experience of future ages. "You cannot see the mountain near....It was not until the nineteenth century, whose speculative genius is a sort of living Hamlet, that the tragedy of *Hamlet* could find such wondering readers<sup>2</sup>."

What are the causes of this unique acceptance and fame? First, undoubtedly, stands the character of Hamlet himself. "The figure of Hamlet, as it shaped itself in Shakespeare's imagination and came to life in his drama, is one of the very few immortal figures of art and poetry,...like Cervantes' Don Quixote, exactly its contemporary, and Goethe's Faust<sup>3</sup>."

As Shakespeare's works are one of the "world-books," so Hamlet is one of the few world-characters: a supreme embodiment of the universal in the individual. The interpretations, indeed, of his character are multitudinous and conflicting, but they have this at least in common: the recognition of its all-surpassing interest and significance. "Three hundred years after his creation, Hamlet is still the confidant and friend of sad and thoughtful souls in every land. There is something unique in this. With such piercing vision has Shakespeare searched out the depths of his own, and at the same time of all human, nature, and so boldly and surely has he depicted the outward semblance of what he saw, that, centuries later, men of every country and of every race have felt their own being moulded like wax in his hand, and have seen themselves in his poetry as in a mirror<sup>3</sup>."

Then, *Hamlet* is the "most contemplative" of Shakespeare's plays. All, indeed, but conspicuously those of his maturity, are full of the "wisdom of life," of incidental revelation of its mysteries. But in *Hamlet* the revelation seems most deliberate, most conscious; and the play's meditative element is one of the

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnet* CVII.

<sup>2</sup> Emerson.

<sup>3</sup> Brandes.



factors of its popularity. For the questions with which *Hamlet* confronts us are those which (in Emerson's phrase) "knock for answer at every heart." The problem "to be or not to be"; the problem of "the something after death"; the thought of "a divinity that shapes" our destinies; the eternal enigma of life's inequalities and injustices (III. i. 70), of the seemingly unmerited suffering of the innocent (Ophelia), of the disproportion between wrong-doing or error and its punishment (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern), of inherited responsibility which crushes one (Hamlet), while another (Fortinbras) starts free on the path of prosperity and fame; the inspiring sense of the world's beauty and wonder, of man's glorious attributes; the mystery, on the other hand, of the dominance of evil: these are things fundamental, things that touch all, that permanently interest mankind; and *Hamlet* is the profoundest meditation on them of the world's profoundest mind—Shakespeare's "recorded convictions." To all, therefore, according to the measure of their powers of understanding and reception, *Hamlet* brings a vital message.

And as it is pre-eminently the Tragedy of Thought, so *Hamlet*—the representation of inaction—is the Tragedy of Action: hence its enduring success on the stage. *Hamlet* is a great acting-play, despite some slowness of movement<sup>1</sup>, inherent in the subject and increased by the exceptional length. The theme is great and *per se* quite clear: 'will the son avenge his murdered father?' It is kept before us clearly, with the heightening effect of Hamlet's irresolution and the King's counter-plotting. It deals with elemental passions—filial piety, revenge, the instinct of self-defence—which come home to all. It is developed by the essential method of dramatic "action"—that is, through great happenings, great crises: witness the Ghost's appearance to Hamlet, the Play-scene (that miracle of picturesqueness and melodrama), Hamlet's interview with his mother. It closes in complete satisfaction of the natural desire to see vengeance done on the guilty, and done by the hero, whose

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge characterises *Hamlet* as the slowest of Shakespeare's tragedies (and *Macbeth* as the swiftest) in movement.



death also satisfies us, for we feel that it is "the only way," the only possible atonement of his hesitations, and salvation of his tortured spirit. And if great character-interest be (as it surely is) a necessary part of "action," then in this respect *Hamlet* (as we have seen) stands supreme. Other causes, too, of its stage-popularity will occur to the student: the pathos of Ophelia's fortunes, the introduction of the supernatural (one of the permanent, because ever effective, dramatic motives), the grimly humorous relief (v. 1), and the range of character-contrast in the tragedy, which gives such diversity of impression. This last interest is very important. It radiates round Hamlet. From different points of view Horatio, Laertes, Fortinbras, and the Player (II. 2. 527—548) are all foils to him. His whole surroundings, with their corruptness and plotting, are a contrast to his purity of motive. His assumed madness sets off Ophelia's real madness.

## X.

THE PERSONAL ELEMENT IN "HAMLET."

I think, too, that a strong reason why for many readers *Hamlet* (like *The Tempest*) means so much is the feeling that here we get near to Shakespeare himself; that the tragedy contains a measure of self-revelation. Some critics, of course, reject altogether the personal interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. His art, they insist, is purely impersonal, the utterances of his characters are to be regarded as purely "dramatic": far from "unlocking his heart" to us in his dramas, he worked in a sphere of sheer fancy, reproducing neither his own nor the nation's life and experience. I confess that this theory of impersonality, of the creator's absolute self-detachment from what he creates, is beyond my comprehension; nor can I sympathise with the view that even if Shakespeare did project himself into his plays, we have no means at all of determining when he did so. To me his plays are documents which tell us a good deal about Shakespeare—not indeed the details of his political or religious opinions, but the general complexion of his



sympathies, his prevailing mood at different periods of his career, his outlook on life.

Emerson says: "So far from Shakespeare's being the least known, he is the one person, in all modern history, known to us." This is, and presumably was meant as, a paradox; but it seems to me nearer the truth than its barren antithesis—the contention that we can never penetrate behind the veil of fiction, never catch the personal note. If several plays, assignable on sound evidence to a certain period, are marked by the predominance of certain views of life and certain moods, the coincidence surely justifies some inference as to Shakespeare's own outlook on life at that period. Now *Hamlet* belongs to a group of works, tragicomedies<sup>1</sup> and tragedies, in which the general outlook on life is overcast. Shakespeare dwells on the seamy side of things, emphasises the corruptions of society, especially of courts and court life, dissects the frailties of human nature, and represents the world as out of joint. There is much of this temporary spirit of disillusion and embitterment in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare even places in Hamlet's mouth invective more appropriate to a subject than a prince; the very indictment, indeed, of society and of life itself, which he expressed in the *Sonnets*; so that personally I cannot resist the conclusion that Shakespeare had himself lived (in the tragedy outlined in the *Sonnets*) through much, if not all, the desolation to which he makes Hamlet give vent<sup>2</sup>.

Other personal experiences, too, may have left their impress on *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's father died in September, 1601; and early in that year Essex (the subject of the famous allusion in *Henry V.* Prologue v. 29—34) had been condemned to death, while Southampton (the patron to whom *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* were dedicated) was imprisoned for his share in Essex's conspiracy. These incidents may well "have lent fervour to Hamlet's outbursts of grief and of friendship<sup>2</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> *All's Well That Ends Well* (? 1602—1603), *Troilus and Cressida* (1603), *Measure for Measure* (1604).

<sup>2</sup> Herford. We may remember that the name of Shakespeare's only son, who died in 1596, was *Hamnet*.



Moreover, to some of the friends of the fallen nobles there must have been a good deal of unpleasant suggestion in the picture (III. 2. 193) of the faithless favourite.

## XI.

## X HAMLET'S DRAMATIC CRITICISM.

Another of the seemingly personal notes is Hamlet's discourse to the Players (III. 1). It has a prominence which seems somewhat out of proportion to its dramatic relevance. One cannot resist the impression that the poet-actor himself is the speaker<sup>1</sup>. Regarded thus, the discourse possesses a threefold interest; revealing, in some degree, Shakespeare's own feeling towards the actor's profession, his views on the general function of the stage and on acting, and his dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the contemporary theatre.

"That Shakespeare chafed under some of the conditions of the actor's calling is commonly inferred from the 'Sonnets.' There he reproaches himself with becoming 'a motley to the view' (CX. 2), and chides fortune for having provided for his livelihood nothing better than 'public means that public manners breed,' whence his name received a brand (CXI. 4—5). If such self-pity is to be literally interpreted, it only reflected an evanescent mood. His interest in all that touched the efficiency of his profession was permanently active. He was a keen critic of actors' elocution, and in 'Hamlet' shrewdly denounced their common failings<sup>2</sup>, but clearly and hopefully pointed out the road to improvement. His highest ambitions lay, it is true, elsewhere than in acting, and at an early period of his theatrical career he undertook, with triumphant success, the labours of a playwright. But he pursued the profession of an actor loyally and uninterruptedly until he resigned all connection with the theatre within a few years of his death" (Lee).

<sup>1</sup> Note also II. 2. 315—347, and II. 2. 416—430.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. ranting (III. 2. 1—34, V. 1. 276, 277). In III. 2. 238, 239, Hamlet bids the actor not "frown and glare like the conventional stage-murderer."



Moreover, Hamlet's treatment of the Players and rebuke to Polonius (III. 2. 508—511) may fairly be interpreted as an expression of Shakespeare's own sense of the consideration due to his actor's calling. It is as a thoroughly practical playwright—as one who knows by experience gained on the stage itself all the resources and requirements and artistic pitfalls of the theatre—that Shakespeare always writes; and that is one of the points of view from which he must always be judged. "The forethought of the actor is seen on every page of his drama. His stage-sense is supreme." Thus nothing more effective from the stage-aspect was ever written than the Play-scene. It holds an audience spell-bound, and the climax (III. 2. 256) is overwhelming<sup>1</sup>.

It may be added that tradition records only two of the many characters that Shakespeare must have acted, though we do know that he enjoyed a considerable reputation as an actor. One was "the Ghost in his own *Hamlet*," and this, says a writer of the 17th century, was "the top of his performance." The other was the part of Old Adam in *As You Like It*.

<sup>1</sup> Here in some modern stage-versions the curtain falls. The fact that nominally the scene is prolonged after Hamlet's comments to Horatio is only an illustration, among many in Shakespeare's works, how the absence of scenery on the Elizabethan stage affected the structure of plays. In the Elizabethan theatre, as there was no curtain to fall and practically no scenery to mark a change of scene, the tendency was to extend a scene instead of starting a fresh one: as if the playwright thought that certain characters might as well stay behind as go off and return. Cf. *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, I. 1. 127, where strictly it is an awkward, artificial device to make Lysander and Hermia remain for an interview which Egeus would naturally wish to prevent, while the Duke and all the other characters, including Egeus, leave the stage. Cf. again the end of the first scene in *King Lear*, and the third scene in *Richard II*. In each case the interview with which the scene closes would in a modern play be thrown into a fresh scene. For characters to remain behind and wind up a scene appears unnatural, and it risks an anticlimax. But Elizabethan audiences were used to the custom of the actors simply moving from one part of the stage (the so-called "apron stage") to another, to mark a change of dramatic situation; cf. I. 5. ("another part of the platform").



## XII.

## X THE CHARACTER OF HAMLET.

The first thing to recognise is the sheer impossibility of attaining completeness in an estimate of Hamlet's character. Its notes are complexity and mystery; and ultimately it must defy analysis. The chemistry of criticism has evolved no Hamlet formula. He is not to be catalogued under any one heading. The dogmatism of "mere" and "simply" should find no place in criticisms of Hamlet: "mere dreamer," "mere student," "simply an idealist," and the like neat epitomes only epitomise part of a complex whole. Hamlet's character has many aspects; one shades off indefinitely into another, and over all is cast an atmosphere of vague suggestion, a mystery as of twilight. This mystery is the source of his eternal fascination: *Omne ignotum pro miraculo*. The inscrutable will always pique the curiosity of man, the Sibylline Books always find a purchaser.

Hamlet, we shall all admit, is an essentially tragic figure. What primarily constitutes the tragic element? This is ever the same: the failure—at least, the worldly failure—of those from whom much might have been expected, who ought to have "attained," but somehow have not; the non-fulfilment or ruin of high possibilities of character and natural endowment. Hamlet fails absolutely, fulfilling, indeed, the task laid on him, but fulfilling it at an appalling and needless cost. And this failure is tragic in the highest degree because he is one of whom the highest was hoped.

"He was a prince, a born prince...the model of youth and the delight of the world...a beautiful, pure, noble and most moral nature...[to whom] every duty is holy."

Such in brief is Goethe's estimate of Hamlet's character. Some regard the picture as too flattering. They contrast, for instance, what Hamlet says of himself to Ophelia (III. 1). But self-depreciation, probably ironical, born of the bitterness of self-reproach, should not count for much. More to the point is the testimony of the other characters in the play. The only characters with whom we sympathise much sympathise strongly



with Hamlet. Horatio's friendship and the admiration of Fortinbras are witness enough. (Besides, we can judge; perhaps judge better from our external standpoint. Hamlet's horror of things evil; his deep filial piety, shown equally in his reverence and affection for his father and in his passionate pleadings with his mother; his gentleness and geniality with his friends and social inferiors (e.g. the officers and players); his generous spirit in recognising the worth of others (Fortinbras) and the rights of others (Laertes—V. 2. 214); his conscientiousness (hyper-sensitive, it is true, for he has the human defect of his qualities) which demands absolute proof of the King's guilt; his contempt of shams and conventions: these qualities speak for themselves, no less than his rich gifts of intellect and imagination. Well can we believe that Hamlet was the hope of Denmark: "The expectancy and rose of the fair state." But all these possibilities of character and endowment are made null by circumstances. For the circumstances with which he is confronted are precisely such as to bring out all that is weak in Hamlet and to give no scope for a man of his type. Therein lies the pity of Hamlet's lot.] He is born to set right hideously abnormal conditions, and succumbs under the duty: his very merits proving a hindrance.

"The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right!"

Goethe says: "In these words, I imagine, is the key to Hamlet's whole procedure, and to me it is clear that Shakespeare sought to depict a great deed laid upon a soul unequal to the performance of it. In this view I find the piece composed throughout. Here is an oak-tree planted in a costly vase, which should have received into its bosom only lovely flowers; the roots spread out, the vase is shivered to pieces.

"A beautiful, pure, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which makes the hero, sinks beneath a burden which it can neither bear nor throw off; every duty is holy to him,—this too hard. The impossible is required of him,—not the impossible in itself, but the impossible to him."

Yet the pity of it must not blind us as to the measure of



Hamlet's failing, and the lesson which its consequences teach. His procrastination costs in the end the lives of his mother, Ophelia, Polonius, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and himself. Horatio in Hamlet's position would have done the deed at once, and seven lives would have been saved. Nor can any scruple as to the morality of a revenge which involved bloodshed be pleaded in extenuation of Hamlet's tardiness. This aspect is never hinted at. Given the moral certainty of Claudius's guilt, his death must follow. In this respect at any rate Hamlet is "Amleth," and Christianity does not affect the story. He accepts the duty implicitly: he may doubt about everything else, but he never doubts about that. And after the Ghost's revelation Hamlet does *not* doubt. He "takes the Ghost's word for it" absolutely—at first. It is only when two months have been let slip that we find him doubting. The doubt, I take it is then quite genuine; it is no conscious piece of self-jugglery. The impression of the "supernatural soliciting" (to borrow Lady Macbeth's fine phrase) has worn off; lost in a haze of hesitations and self-reproaches and futile brooding.

And so we come to the problem of problems: why does Hamlet put from him this duty to which the strongest conceivable promptings call—his father's foul death, his mother's dishonour (which the death of Claudius can alone end), natural ambition to obtain his rightful inheritance, and the examples of others—"examples gross as earth"? The answer must be sought for in Hamlet's character. It must lie—mainly—in a particular fault, some "one defect," which pervades and perverts the "noble substance" of his whole being. The simplest explanation, if we did not know Hamlet, would be physical cowardice; but Hamlet is no coward, and there is nothing simple about him. We must look deeper.

"In Hamlet" (says Coleridge)... "we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakespeare places in circumstances under which it is obliged to act...: Hamlet is brave and careless of death; *but he vacillates from sensibility,*



*and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve<sup>1</sup>.*"

And again :

"Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth : that action is the chief end of existence,—that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or indeed otherwise than as misfortunes, if they withdraw us from, or render us repugnant to action, and lead us to think and think of doing, until the time has elapsed when we can do anything effectually. In enforcing this moral truth, Shakespeare has shown the fulness and force of his powers ; all that is amiable and excellent in nature is combined in Hamlet, with the exception of one quality. He is a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive human and divine, but the great object of his life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve."

To put the case simply : Hamlet thinks too much. *Wer gar zu viel bedenkt wird wenig leisten<sup>2</sup>*. But why is this antagonistic to action ? Excessive introspection checks action by too curious a consideration of the need and justice of the action contemplated, by over-analysis of the motives which prompt the action, by over-meditation on the probable consequences ("the event," IV. 4. 41) of the action. A man of the Hamlet-type (and the type grows commoner as life grows more complex in its social conditions) sees, or seeks to see, every side of a question. His mind weighs all that may conceivably be said for and against the course proposed. It refines and refines in the futile craving to strike the exact balance between conflicting considerations ; until at last its perception of the essential is obscured by details, its impulse to act undermined by the half-conscious effect of objections and scruples. Imagination conjures up visions of what may befall<sup>3</sup>, and "conscience" paints the worst of the possible results of action—self-reproach. And so the will-power

<sup>1</sup> The italics are mine.

<sup>2</sup> 'He who reflects too much will accomplish little' (Schiller).

<sup>3</sup> Compare Macbeth before Duncan's murder.



is paralysed, the current of resolve dissipated and lost amid the sands of doubt and irresolution. Hamlet is the best critic of Hamlet, and his power of analysis is consciously turned upon himself when he says :

“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all ;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action” (III. i. 83—88).

True, Hamlet, the procrastinator, does much—far more than anyone else. He kills Polonius (in mistake for Claudius) ; he kills Claudius ; he traps Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, sends them to their doom, and himself escapes on board the pirate-ship ; he grapples with Laertes. These are strong acts, witnessing, as a whole, Hamlet’s extraordinary alertness of brain, his possession of the Vergilian “swift mind” which sees into the heart of things and seizes the bearings of a situation at once. Yet these acts do not make Hamlet a man of action. They belong to a single category of action : that is, impulsive action, done under extreme pressure of momentary impulse or absolute necessity. Hamlet has “purely convulsive energies”—not sustained power of resolution : he can act if he *must* : but only if he *must* on the very instant, without time to reflect—in his least typical, least characteristic mood. Give him time to weigh a deed in all its varied relations and potentialities, and the deed is not done. He resembles some engine : let the current of driving power fail, and the machinery stops : let the urgency cease or the access of passion die away, and Hamlet pauses—ponders—procrastinates. And the longer delayed the harder all action grows.

As Hamlet thinks too much (and knows it), so he feels too much. Here again he is self-conscious. A man admires most in others the qualities which he knows he himself lacks. Hamlet surely is picturing himself as the antitype of Horatio when he paints (III. 2. 66—72) his ideal of the man “that is not passion’s slave.”

The tragic hero, says a critic, whatever else he may be, “is always passionate” : naturally, since passion of one form or



another is the parent of the tragic happenings of life. The whole intention of drama is the purification of passion by the representation of its effects in others; and throughout *Hamlet* the hero is shown us, if not as "passion's slave," yet as a man with terrible capacities of feeling, one in whom emotion gains an ascendancy that at times upsets the whole equilibrium of his being. Five signal illustrations stand out: the close of the scene with the Ghost (I. 5), the scene with Ophelia (III. 1), his wild outburst after the Play-scene, the interview with his mother, and the church-yard scene (V. 1. 247—285). But the conception runs through the play. This emotional element in Hamlet is fostered by his self-detachment, for the best discipline of excess of feeling is contact with life and men. At the same time, his sensibility, the stimulus of action, is counterbalanced by his reflectiveness, the check of action. Feeling less, Hamlet would have less inclination to act; thinking less, he would have more power to act. Through the contest of these antagonistic tendencies his whole soul is tossed about in a restless ecstasy of self-torture. But when feeling does not translate itself into action, the expression of it is apt in the end to become a substitute for action. We see this in Hamlet and Shakespeare's Richard II. They represent the type of men who expend in fine feeling and fine phrasing the force that should go into resolute deeds. They "unpack the heart with words" (II. 2. 563): how Hamlet furnishes his own condemnation—"as good as a chorus" to himself! Their eloquent self-reproach becomes an anodyne to the conscience. It is the pernicious "should," "the spendthrift sigh" of regret "that hurts by easing" (IV. 7. 122, 123), the "sweet oblivious antidote" that but enfeebles more the weak will.

It has been argued that the root-cause of Hamlet's inaction is his melancholy, and that this melancholy springs from the moral shock of his mother's marriage: the play (we are told) does not show us the normal Hamlet, the youth of whom so much had been hoped, but a heart-sick, disillusionised Hamlet, who at this particular juncture has lost faith in humanity and fallen into the mood of depression which makes active participation in the affairs of life peculiarly hard to all of us. This is



true—up to a point: Hamlet's melancholy *is* a contributory cause of his inaction; but surely Shakespeare makes us feel that, apart altogether from the influence of any particular mood, Hamlet would never, under any circumstances whatsoever, have braced himself to the deed. He *can't* do the thing: I doubt whether he could ever do any great decisive thing deliberately: and his inability represents that sheer distaste for action which in actual life is seen to go with an over-reflective temperament. The world knows its Hamlets, though it may not be able to diagnose in precise terms the disease of their souls. But whatever the cause, the effect upon Hamlet of his failure is patent. A dreadful gloom settles down on him (as on Macbeth), lit only by flashes of spasmodic and ineffectual resolve. The inner world of his early dreams is changed to a "centre of indifference" and hopelessness. His self-distrust—what influence more deadly?—deepens, till his wearied spirit finds refuge in the fatalism<sup>1</sup> that accepts the accidents of the moment as the over-rulings of an irresistible Power and disclaims responsibility for its own actions or inaction. Thus it comes that Hamlet submits to be sent to England, contemplates with undisturbed callousness the doom of his boyhood friends, and is stoically "ready" (v. 2. 208—212) for whatever may hap. "I wasted time, and now doth time waste me," says Richard II. (v. 5. 49). So with Hamlet: "he plays with chance till finally chance plays with him," and "dies the victim of mere circumstance and accident." Yet, let us always remember of poor Hamlet, that he dies bravely—true son of his sea-king sires. *He* may have doubted whether clouds would break: but they do break at the last, and the light of new hope for his country falls on his blood-stained atonement.

"Good-night, sweet prince;  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!"

Of the many untouched phases of Hamlet's character there is one on which a few words must be said: his madness. Why does Hamlet feign madness? Surely, as a measure of self-

<sup>1</sup> This sense of fatalism is quite the outstanding feature of the characterisation of Hamlet towards the close.



defence<sup>1</sup>. The Ghost's revelation shows him the danger to his own life, and on his life depends his father's avengement: he must live at least till that is achieved. But the shock of the Ghost's revelation robs Hamlet of his self-mastery at the moment, and imposes on him an impossible strain in the future: knowing the truth, he must meet his father's murderer and never betray his knowledge till his appointed work is done. To ask this of himself—and Hamlet knows himself, as we have seen—is to ask too much. But his swift brain hits on an expedient which his present (I. 5. 92—181) mood suggests. Natural revulsion of feeling has cast him from a state of extreme horror into its opposite, or apparent opposite. Why not maintain this “antic disposition” as a screen under which he can watch the King and wait his opportunity of revenge? Claudius will not trouble about a madman, even though he be the rightful claimant of the throne and the people's favourite; and in a madman things will be overlooked that else might excite the King's suspicion. Under this disguise Hamlet can feel sure of himself.

And may we not say that, roughly, the device justifies itself up till the Play-scene? At any rate, Hamlet is alive two months after the Ghost's revelation, and must have had chances of carrying out the Ghost's injunction: witness, indeed, his self-reproaches (II. 2. 543—557). Nor seemingly (but we cannot be sure with such a villain) does Claudius suspect the real cause of Hamlet's “distemper” earlier than the Play-scene, though his suspicious cunning tells him that more than grief for his father's death (II. 2. 7—10), or disappointed love (III. 1. 162—175), is at work in Hamlet. After the Play-scene the madness must be a transparent feint to Claudius. Its prominence declines as the real madness of Ophelia develops.

Again, is Hamlet mad in any degree?

Extravagances which lie on the surface, such as the wild appearance described by Ophelia (II. 1. 71—75) and irresponsible bearing towards the King and Polonius, belong to the part he

<sup>1</sup> In the *Hystorie of Hamblet* he says: “I am constrained to playe the madde man to save my life.”



has assumed and have no relation to the question of his insanity, except in so far as the assumption may have helped to induce the reality. But there is a deeper vein of something abnormal and amiss with Hamlet. The glimpses vouchsafed us of his past are sufficient, and no doubt designed, to show us what Hamlet once was. We see that he is "morbidly changed from his former state of thought, feeling and conduct." The mood of world-weariness which he analyses in his speech to Rosen-crantz and Guildenstern and which grows with the growth of his self-distrust and self-disgust, is a melancholy that justifies the description "morbid." It is a frame of mind antecedent to and not far removed from insanity; a state which many pass through without becoming truly insane, but which often does culminate in actual insanity. And the revulsion from it comes periodically in those outbursts of hysterical vehemence in which Hamlet certainly seems to lose self-mastery, and even self-consciousness. I think then we may conclude that the equipoise of Hamlet's mind has been disturbed in some degree<sup>1</sup>; nor could the case well be otherwise with a man of such sensibility, assailed so pitilessly by "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

## XIII.

## OTHER CHARACTERS.

In *Hamlet* all is focussed on Hamlet. His personality constitutes the dramatic unity of the tragedy. Most of the *dramatis personæ*—perhaps, indeed, there is no real exception—are exhibited through the medium of more or less direct comparison with him. It is in their relation to him that those dealt with here will be noticed.

"There is nothing" (says Brandes) "more profoundly conceived in this play than the Prince's relation to Ophelia. Hamlet is genius in love—genius with its great demands and its highly unconventional conduct." The crucial scene in which this relation is treated is the sole occasion on which Hamlet

<sup>1</sup> One may hope, surely, that this is so, to the lessening, in some degree, of Hamlet's suffering. He suffers from first to last.



and Ophelia are shown us together alone (III. 1). We have been prepared for it—for the change, that is, in Hamlet's bearing to Ophelia—by her description to Polonius in the first scene of the second Act. The idea of the two meetings is the same, but the dramatist takes care to avoid repetition in its development. Some critics interpret Hamlet's interview with Ophelia, after she has been set to entrap him, by an assumption for which the text furnishes no explicit warranty.

"Here" (III. 1. 103—150), says Coleridge, "it is evident that the penetrating Hamlet perceives, from the strange and forced manner of Ophelia, that the sweet girl was not acting a part of her own, but was a decoy; and his after-speeches are not so much directed to her as to the listeners and spies. Such a discovery in a mood so anxious and irritable accounts for a certain harshness in him." The scene is sometimes acted in accordance with this view; Polonius is made incautiously to show himself. But a matter so important to the characterisation of Hamlet himself, and to the movement of the whole play, should not (one feels) be made dependent on a theatrical expedient of which the text gives no direct indication. We ought surely to look deeper, for some organic cause of Hamlet's unsparing bitterness of contempt and repulsion. And may we not find the cause in Hamlet's idealising love of Ophelia and its disappointment? What might not a Rosalind or Juliet have been to Hamlet at this turning-point of his life? But Ophelia is none such: she is "plainly quite young and inexperienced"<sup>1</sup>; and hers are the passive virtues—gentleness and self-effacing submission. She has had to choose between her family and her lover: and she has not chosen him. Acting under her father's orders, she has repelled Hamlet's visits and letters, and he thinks she has turned against him because the world has<sup>1</sup>. He may not know how far she is below the ideal his love and fancy had pictured of her—that she has handed over his letter, and plays the decoy; but he knows enough for resentment; and

"to be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain."

<sup>1</sup> Bradley.



Disillusionised with her as with his mother<sup>1</sup>, Hamlet vents on Ophelia his disgust with the whole sex. All womanhood is "frail" in his eyes (I. 2. 146), just as "*all* the uses of this world" are flat and profitless. With Hamlet the tendency to generalise is irresistible, and a soured idealist is your true pessimist.

Sympathy with Hamlet makes criticism harsh on Ophelia :

"If he shows himself hard, almost cruel, to her, it is because she was weak and tried to deceive him. She is a soft, yielding creature, with no power of resistance ; a loving soul, but without the passion which gives strength. She resembles Desdemona in the unwisdom with which she acts towards her lover, but falls far short of her in warmth and resoluteness of affection. She does not in the least understand Hamlet's grief over his mother's conduct. She observes his depression without divining its cause...and, in spite of her compassion for his morbid state, she consents without demur to decoy him into talking with her, while her father and the King spy upon their meeting" (Brandes).

All this is true : Ophelia did not understand Hamlet : but who does—exactly? And if she fails Hamlet at the hour of his greatest need of sympathy and support, surely she deserves less our blame for this than our pity that her childlike, helpless life should be involved in his tragic doom and the consequences of his failure to act. If Hamlet had done the great deed, he would have made himself master of the throne, and what then could have interfered with his love of Ophelia? His bitterness to her is one of the minor unconscious ironies of the tragedy. For in their fortunes, as even in some phases of their characters, Hamlet and Ophelia are alike. She too is the victim of circumstances : called upon—like Hamlet—to play an impossible part, and succumbing—like Hamlet. Here indeed, in her case as in his, are the "Tears of Things."

In Ophelia lies, I take it, the main cause of Hamlet's contemptuous hostility to Polonius, whom he treats as a

<sup>1</sup> Mentally Hamlet compares them. Perhaps the inner meaning of his reproaches to Ophelia is : "You are like my mother ! You too could have acted as she did !" (Brandes).



merely "tedious old fool"—which Polonius assuredly is not. Hamlet must have guessed that Polonius has come between Ophelia and himself, and this adds personal hate to the scorn which the type of character represented by Polonius would under any circumstances inspire in Hamlet. He even shows his feeling against Polonius to Ophelia herself (III. I. 130—133): an almost inconceivable barbarity in a man of Hamlet's delicacy of temperament. He has too another ground of disgust with the Chamberlain. Polonius, it would appear (I. 2. 47—49), had served under Hamlet's father, and attained high position and influence at the Danish Court—facts which should give us pause if we are minded to dismiss Polonius with Hamlet's own scornful estimate. Yet now Polonius is the devoted slave of the new King, the willing instrument of the new *régime* and all its tortuous policy. Naturally Hamlet is bitter against such a trimmer. Nor could there, apart from reasons for direct personal resentment, be any community of feeling between types so antagonistic.

Polonius<sup>1</sup> represents the spirit of worldliness in its worst aspects; the spirit which at a very early age says goodbye to any idealism it ever possessed and takes for its guiding rule a low estimate of human nature; which holds that every man has his price, and that trickery and intrigue are your only weapons to fight the world withal; which accepts the maxim that "whatever is is best," or to be made the best of, without too curious a consideration of antecedents or results; which almost deifies convention and compromise.

His position in the state proves the ability of Polonius: the man whom Claudius deems it worth while to conciliate must be a good deal more than "a foolish prating knave" (III. 4. 214): and to ability is added the practical wisdom of great experience. Polonius's counsel to Laertes is an admirable epitome, as far as it goes. He can even strike a lofty note (I. 3. 77—79), sounded, maybe, seldom in his own life. Such men, with their insight into the seamy side of human nature, their consequent caution

<sup>1</sup> It seems to me very improbable that Shakespeare meant to satirise the statesman Burleigh, who died in 1598.



The names are not all the same. Polonius and Reynaldo are represented respectively by *Corambis*<sup>1</sup> and *Montano*. The "King" or "Duke" of the "interlude" is *Albertus* instead of Gonzago<sup>2</sup>. Claudius is always simply "the King"—never (I believe) named; Osric is merely "a Braggart Gentleman," and Francisco the second of "two Centinels."

There are innumerable verbal differences; misplacements of lines and phrases; mutilations and perversions which turn the original (whatever it may have been) into something not remote from nonsense; substitutions of verse-form for prose and *vice versa*; some variations in the order of the scenes; and many speeches that are either altogether unlike anything in the Second Quarto or merely give similar sense in an epitomised form.

What, then, is the history of the First Quarto? Critics agree on one thing—that it was an unauthorised version. No other view is tenable in the face of such corruptions of the text. No writer would have suffered his work to go forth in such a guise. Plays, we know, were pirated, and one method of piracy was to publish an edition compiled from shorthand notes taken during the performance and supplemented, if possible, by the help of some of the performers. To this practice, no doubt, we owe the First Quarto of *Henry V.* The First Quarto of *Hamlet*, it is conceded by all, must have had a similar origin. Hence the significant claim on the title-page of the Second Quarto, that it followed "the true and perfect Coppie."

Some see in the First Quarto a very imperfect version of the complete play given us in the Second Quarto; and the differences between the two Quartos are supposed to be accounted for by the fact that the First was an unauthentic, the Second an authentic version. But the differences are too great to be explained thus; so we will pass at once to a theory which has found considerable favour. It is to this effect: "That there was an old play on the

<sup>1</sup> See p. xviii. *Corambis* and *Montano* may have been the names in Kyd's *Hamlet*.

<sup>2</sup> The First Quarto gives the name as *Albertus* in the Play-scene; but previously it made Hamlet say to the Players, "Can you not play the murder of *Gonzago*?"



story of *Hamlet*, some portions of which are still preserved in  $Q_1$ ; that about the year 1602 Shakespeare took this and began to remodel it for the stage, as he had done with other plays; that  $Q_1$  represents<sup>1</sup> the Play after it had been retouched by him to a certain extent, but before his alterations were complete; and that in  $Q_2$  we have for the first time the *Hamlet* of Shakespeare<sup>2</sup>."

The acceptance of this theory is not exempt from grave difficulties. Knowing how slight is the relation of *Henry V.* to the old play of *The Famous Victories*, and of *King Lear* to its predecessor, one may well be loth to assume that *in the plenitude of his powers* Shakespeare would be content merely to revise and remodel. That he should adopt the story of some existing piece and adapt it to his own purpose would be quite in accord with his practice; but that then—in 1602—he should actually retain and incorporate work of another dramatist is a proposition which I cannot accept.

Again, the old Hamlet-play, as we have seen, was undoubtedly by Kyd. Consequently the un-Shakespearian portions of the First Quarto which are supposed to be survivals from the old play ought to be in the style of Kyd<sup>3</sup>. But Dowden says: "The general style of the *Hamlet* of 1603 is much more like that of an ill-reported play of that date than like the style of a play of Kyd's and Marlowe's time"; and again: "with the exception of [five lines], I see nothing that looks pre-Shakespearian, and I see much that is entirely unlike the work of Kyd" (i.e. in the First Quarto). The characteristic note—bombastic declamation—of early Elizabethan tragedy is sounded scarcely at all in the First Quarto (apart from the "interlude"). Lastly, if our *Hamlet* had passed through this extensive process of recasting and rewriting, *would it be the homogeneous, uniform work that it is?* This consideration is, to my mind, the great objection to the application to Shakespeare's plays of these theories of recasting and extensive revision.

<sup>1</sup> i.e. in a garbled version. The corruption of text speaks for itself.

<sup>2</sup> Clarendon edition, quoted by Furness, II. p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Similarities of phrase and sentiment (see p. xvii.) are obviously on a different plane from whole passages.



But what is my own view? I hold that the conditions of its publication cover much of the gap that separates the First Quarto from the Second. An appreciable residuum, however, of indisputably "alien work" in the First Quarto has to be accounted for. Perhaps the solution of the whole problem may be found on some such lines as these: that Shakespeare used the old play of *Hamlet* just as he used the old play of *King Leir*, i.e. as the basis of an entirely new play—written substantially in 1601—1602, performed in an abbreviated acting version by the company to which he belonged, entered on the Stationers' Register in July, 1602, and published<sup>1</sup> from an authentic copy in 1604 (Second Quarto); and that the piratical edition of 1603 (First Quarto) was compiled from shorthand notes taken at a performance and afterwards put together by some theatrical hackwriter who supplemented the deficiencies of the shorthand report by speeches of his own composition, in which he sought to carry on the general drift and style of the piece, and in which he made some use of the old pre-Shakespearian *Hamlet*. To me, the *Hamlet* of 1603 has the appearance of a medley: as if someone familiar with the real *Hamlet*, and also with the pre-Shakespearian *Hamlet*, had been given a very imperfect report of the former and told to do the best he could with it.

It may be interesting to end with an extract from the First Quarto which illustrates its mixture of obviously genuine Shakespeare with spurious work that gives merely the general drift of what we have in the authentic Quarto. Here is part of the First Quarto's version of Hamlet's long soliloquy (II. 1):

"*Ham.* Why what a dunghill idiote slaue am I?  
 Why these Players here draw water from eyes:  
 For Hecuba, why what is Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?  
 What would he do and if he had my losse?  
 His father mured, and a Crowne bereft him,

<sup>1</sup> With some changes, made by Shakespeare, such as the alteration of the names *Corambis* and *Montano*, the expansion of the passage on the "travelling" of the Players and perhaps some modification of the Queen's part.



He would turne all his teares to droppes of blood,  
Amaze the standers by with his laments,  
Strike more then wonder in the judiciall eares.  
Confound the ignorant, and make mute the wise,  
Indeede his passion would be generall.  
Yet I like to an ass and Iohn a Dreames,  
Hauing my father murdred by a villaine,  
Stand still, and let it passe, why sure I am a coward:  
Who pluckes me by the beard, or twites my nose,  
Giue's me the lie i'th throate downe to the lungs,  
Sure I should take it, or else I haue no gall,  
Or by this I should a fatted all the region kites  
With this slaues offell, this damned villaine,  
Treacherous, bawdy, murderous villaine:  
Why this is braue, that I the sonne of my deare father,  
Should like a scalion, like a very drabbe  
Thus raile in wordes. About my braine,  
I haue heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play,  
Hath, by the very cunning of the scene, confest a murder  
Committed long before.  
This spirit that I haue seene may be the Diuell,  
And out of my weakenesse and my melancholy,  
As he is very potent with such men,  
Doth seeke to damne me, I will haue sounder proofes,  
The play's the thing,  
Wherein I'le catch the conscience of the King."

# HAMLET.



## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

CLAUDIUS, King of Denmark.

HAMLET, son to the former, and nephew to the present King.

POLONIUS, lord chamberlain.

HORATIO, friend to Hamlet.

LAERTES, son to Polonius.

VOLTIMAND,

CORNELIUS,

ROSENCRANTZ,

GUILDENSTERN,

OSRIC,

A Gentleman,

A Priest.

} courtiers.

MARCELLUS, }  
BERNARDO, } officers

FRANCISCO, a soldier.

REYNALDO, servant to Polonius.

Players.

Two Clowns, grave-diggers.

FORTINBRAS, prince of Norway.

A Captain.

English Ambassadors.

GERTRUDE, Queen of Denmark, and mother to Hamlet.

OPHELIA, daughter to Polonius.

Lords, Ladies, Officers, Soldiers, Sailors, Messengers,  
and other Attendants.

Ghost of Hamlet's Father.

SCENE : *Denmark.*

Sh.'s opening scenes very striking & well brought out.

# HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK.

## ACT I.

SCENE I. *Elsinore. A platform before the castle.*

FRANCISCO at his post. Enter to him BERNARDO.

*Officer* Bernardo. Who's there?

*Admirer* Francisco. Nay, answer me: stand and unfold yourself.

Bernardo. Long live the king!

Francisco. Bernardo?

Bernardo. He.

Francisco. You come most carefully upon your hour. 5

Ber. 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.

Francisco. For this relief much thanks: 'tis bitter cold,  
And I am sick at heart.

Ber. Have you had quiet guard?

Francisco. Not a mouse stirring. 10

Bernardo. Well, good night.

If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,  
The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.

Fran. I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who is there?



*Friend of J. official*  
*Enter* HORATIO and MARCELLUS.

*Hor.* Friends to this ground.

*Marcellus.* And liegemen to the Dane, 15

*Fran.* Give you good night.

*Marcellus.* O, farewell, honest soldier :  
 Who hath relieved you?

*Francisco.* Bernardo has my place.  
 Give you good night. [Exit.

*Marcellus.* Holla ! Bernardo !

*Bernardo.* Say,—  
 What, is Horatio there?

*Horatio.* A piece of him.

*Ber.* Welcome, Horatio : welcome, good Marcellus. 20

*Mar.* What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?

*Bernardo.* I have seen nothing.

*Marcellus.* Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,  
 And will not let belief take hold of him  
 Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us : 25  
 Therefore I have entreated him along  
 With us to watch the minutes of this night ;  
 That, if again this apparition come,  
 He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

*Hor.* Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

*Bernardo.* Sit down awhile ; 30  
 And let us once again assail your ears,  
 That are so fortified against our story,  
 What we two nights have seen.

*Horatio.* Well, sit we down,  
 And let us hear Bernardo speak of this.

*Bernardo.* Last night of all, 35  
 When yond same star that's westward from the pole  
 Had made his course to illume that part of heaven

Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
The bell then beating one,—

*Mar.* Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again! 40

*Enter Ghost.*

*Bernardo.* In the same figure, like the king that's dead.

*Marcellus.* Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

*Bernardo.* Looks it not like the king? mark it, Horatio.

*Horatio.* Most like: it harrows me with fear and wonder.

*Ber.* It would be spoke to.

*Marcellus.* Question it, Horatio. 45

*Horatio.* What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,

Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark

Did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee, speak!

*Marcellus.* It is offended.

*Bernardo.* See, it stalks away! 50

*Horatio.* Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!

[*Exit Ghost.*

*Marcellus.* 'Tis gone, and will not answer.

*Ber.* How now, Horatio! you tremble and look pale:

Is not this something more than fantasy?

What think you on't? 55

*Horatio.* Before my God, I might not this believe

Without the sensible and true avouch

Of mine own eyes.

*Marcellus.* Is it not like the king?

*Horatio.* As thou art to thyself:

Such was the very armour he had on 60

When he the ambitious Norway combated;

So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,



He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.

'Tis strange.

*Mar.* Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour, 65  
With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.

*Hor.* In what particular thought to work I know not;  
But, in the gross and scope of my opinion,  
This bodes some strange eruption to our state.

*Mar.* Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows, 70  
Why this same strict and most observant watch  
So nightly toils the subject of the land;  
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,  
And foreign mart for implements of war;  
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task 75  
Does not divide the Sunday from the week;  
What might be toward, that this sweaty haste  
Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day:  
Who is't that can inform me?

*Horatio.* That can I;  
At least, the whisper goes so. Our last king, 80  
Whose image even but now appear'd to us,  
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,  
Thereto prick'd on by a most emulate pride,  
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet—  
For so this side of our known world esteem'd him— 85  
Did slay this Fortinbras; who, by a seal'd compact,  
Well ratified by law and heraldry,  
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands  
Which he stood seized of to the conqueror:  
Against the which, a moiety competent 90  
Was gaged by our king; which had return'd  
To the inheritance of Fortinbras,  
Had he been vanquisher; as, by the same covenant,  
And carriage of the article design'd,

His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,  
 Of unimproved mettle hot and full,  
 Hath in the skirts of Norway, here and there,  
 Shark'd up a list of lawless resolute,  
 For food and diet, to some enterprise  
 That hath a stomach in't: which is no other—  
 As it doth well appear unto our state—

95

100

But to recover of us, by strong hand  
 And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands  
 So by his father lost: and this, I take it,  
 Is the main motive of our preparations,  
 The source of this our watch, and the chief head  
 Of this post-haste and romage in the land.

105

*Bernardo.* I think it be no other but e'en so:  
 Well may it sort, that this portentous figure  
 Comes armed through our watch; so like the king  
 That was and is the question of these wars.

110

*Horatio.* A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.  
 In the most high and palmy state of Rome,  
 A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,

The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead  
 Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets:

115

As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,  
Disasters in the sun; and the moist star,  
 Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands,  
 Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse:

120

And even the like precursor of fierce events,  
 As harbingers preceding still the fates

And prologue to the omen coming on,  
 Have heaven and earth together demonstrated  
 Unto our climatures and countrymen.—

125

But, soft, behold! lo, where it comes again!



*Re-enter Ghost.*

I'll cross it, though it blast me. Stay, illusion!  
If thou hast any sound, or use of voice,  
Speak to me:

If there be any good thing to be done, 130  
That may to thee do ease and grace to me,  
Speak to me:

If thou art privy to thy country's fate,  
Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid,  
O, speak! 135

Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life  
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,  
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,  
[Cock crows.

Speak of it: stay, and speak! Stop it, Marcellus.

*Marcellus.* Shall I strike at it with my partisan? 140

*Horatio.* Do, if it will not stand.

*Bernardo.* 'Tis here!

*Horatio.* 'Tis here!

*Marcellus.* 'Tis gone! [Exit Ghost.

We do it wrong, being so majestical,  
To offer it the show of violence;  
For it is, as the air, invulnerable, 145  
And our vain blows malicious mockery.

*Bernardo.* It was about to speak when the cock crew.

*Horatio.* And then it started like a guilty thing  
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard,  
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn, 150  
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat  
Awake the god of day; and at his warning,  
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,  
The extravagant and erring spirit hies

To his confine: and of the truth herein

This present object made probation.

155

*Marcellus.* It faded on the crowing of the cock.

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes

Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,

The bird of dawning singeth all night long:

160

And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad;

The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,

No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm;

So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

*Horatio.* So have I heard, and do in part believe it. 165

But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,

Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill:

Break we our watch up: and, by my advice,

Let us impart what we have seen to-night

Unto young Hamlet: for, upon my life,

170

This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him:

Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,

As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

*Marcellus.* Let's do't, I pray; and I this morning know  
Where we shall find him most conveniently. [*Exeunt.* 175

## SCENE II. *A room of state in the castle.*

*Enter the King, Queen, HAMLET, POLONIUS, LAERTES,  
VOLTIMAND, CORNELIUS, Lords, and Attendants.*

*King.* Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death  
The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom  
To be contracted in one brow of woe;  
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature,

5



That we with wisest sorrow think on him,  
Together with remembrance of ourselves.  
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,  
The imperial jointress to this warlike state,  
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,—  
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,  
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,  
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,—  
Taken to wife: nor have we herein barr'd  
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone  
With this affair along: for all, our thanks.  
Now follows, that you know, young Fortinbras,  
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,  
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death  
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,  
Colleagu'd with the dream of his advantage,  
He hath not fail'd to pester us with message,  
Importing the surrender of those lands  
Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,  
To our most valiant brother. So much for him.  
Now for ourself, and for this time of meeting:  
Thus much the business is: we have here writ  
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras,—  
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears  
Of this his nephew's purpose,—to suppress  
His further gait herein; in that the levies,  
The lists and full proportions, are all made  
Out of his subject: and we here dispatch  
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltimand,  
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway;  
Giving to you no further personal power  
To business with the king, more than the scope  
Of these delated articles allow.

10

15

20

25

30

35

Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

*Cor., Vol.* In that and all things will we show our duty. 40

*King.* We doubt it nothing: heartily farewell.

[*Exeunt Voltimand and Cornelius.*]

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?

You told us of some suit; what is't, Laertes?

You cannot speak of reason to the Dane,

And lose your voice: what wouldst thou beg, Laertes, 45

That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?

The head is not more native to the heart,

The hand more instrumental to the mouth,

Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.

What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

*Laertes.*

My dread lord, 50

Your leave and favour to return to France;

From whence though willingly I came to Denmark,

To show my duty in your coronation;

Yet now, I must confess, that duty done,

My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France, 55

And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

*King.* Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?

*Pol.* He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave  
By laboursome petition, and at last

Upon his will I seal'd my hard consent:

I do beseech you, give him leave to go. 60

*King.* Take thy fair hour, Laertes; time be thine,  
And thy best graces spend it at thy will!

But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,—

*Ham.* [*Aside*] A little more than kin, and less than kind. 65

*King.* How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

*Hamlet.* Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun.

*Queen.* Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,  
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.



Do not for ever with thy vailed lids  
Seek for thy noble father in the dust:  
Thou know'st 'tis common; all that live must die,  
Passing through nature to eternity.

70

*Hamlet.* Ay, madam, it is common.

*Queen.*

If it be,

Why seems it so particular with thee?

75

*Hamlet.* Seems, madam! nay, it is; I know not "seems."

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,

Nor customary suits of solemn black,

Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,

No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,

Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,

Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,

That can denote me truly: these, indeed, seem,

For they are actions that a man might play:

But I have that within which passeth show;

85

These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

*King.* 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,

To give these mourning duties to your father:

But, you must know, your father lost a father;

That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound

90

In filial obligation for some term

To do obsequious sorrow: but to persevere

In obstinate condolment, is a course

Of impious stubbornness; 'tis unmanly grief:

It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,

95

A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,

An understanding simple and unschool'd:

For what we know must be, and is as common

As any the most vulgar thing to sense,

Why should we in our peevish opposition

100

Take it to heart? Fie! 'tis a fault to heaven,

A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,  
 To reason most absurd; whose common theme  
 Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,  
 From the first corse till he that died to-day, 105  
 "This must be so." We pray you, throw to earth  
 This unprevailing woe, and think of us  
 As of a father: for let the world take note,  
 You are the most immediate to our throne;  
 And with no less nobility of love 110  
 Than that which dearest father bears his son,  
 Do I impart toward you. For your intent  
 In going back to school in Wittenberg,  
 It is most retrograde to our desire:  
 And we beseech you, bend you to remain 115  
 Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,  
 Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

*Queen.* Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet:  
 I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

*Hamlet.* I shall in all my best obey you, madam. 120

*King.* Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply:  
 Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come;  
 This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet  
 Sits smiling to my heart: in grace whereof,  
 No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day, 125  
 But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,  
 And the king's rouse the heavens shall bruit again,  
 Re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.

[*Exeunt all except Hamlet.*]

✓ *Hamlet.* O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
 Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!  
 Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd 130  
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!  
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable



Seem to me all the uses of this world!

Fie on't! O, fie! 'tis an unweeded garden, 135

That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature

Possess it merely. That it should come to this!

But two months dead! nay, not so much, not two:

So excellent a king; that was, to this,

Hyperion to a satyr: so loving to my mother, 140

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven

Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!

Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,

As if increase of appetite had grown

By what it fed on: and yet, within a month,—

Let me not think on't,—Frailty, thy name is woman! 145

A little month, or ere those shoes were old

With which she follow'd my poor father's body,

Like Niobe, all tears;—why she, even she—

O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason, 150

Would have mourn'd longer—married with my uncle,

My father's brother; but no more like my father

Than I to Hercules: within a month;

Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears

Had left the flushing in her galled eyes, 155

She married. O, most wicked speed!

It is not, nor it cannot come to, good:

But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!

*Enter* HORATIO, MARCELLUS, and BERNARDO.

*Hor.* Hail to your lordship!

*Hamlet.*

I am glad to see you well:

Horatio,—or I do forget myself. 160

*Horatio.* The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.

*Hamlet.* Sir, my good friend; I'll change that name  
with you:

And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?  
Marcellus?

*Marcellus.* My good lord,— 165

*Hamlet.* I am very glad to see you. Good even, sir.  
But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?

*Horatio.* A truant disposition, good my lord.

*Hamlet.* I would not hear your enemy say so;  
Nor shall you do mine ear that violence 170

To make it truster of your own report  
Against yourself: I know you are no truant.

But what is your affair in Elsinore?

We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart. 174

*Horatio.* My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.

*Hamlet.* I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student;  
I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

*Horatio.* Indeed, my lord, it follow'd hard upon.

*Hamlet.* Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral baked meats  
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables. 180

Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven

Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio!

My father,—methinks I see my father.

*Horatio.* Where, my lord?

*Hamlet.* In my mind's eye, Horatio.

*Horatio.* I saw him once; he was a goodly king. 185

*Hamlet.* He was a man, take him for all in all,  
I shall not look upon his like again.

*Horatio.* My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

*Hamlet.* Saw who?

*Hor.* My lord, the king your father.

*Hamlet.* The king my father!

*Horatio.* Season your admiration for a while 191  
With an attent ear, till I may deliver,  
Upon the witness of these gentlemen,



This marvel to you.

*Hamlet.* For God's love, let me hear.

*Horatio.* Two nights together had these gentlemen,  
Marcellus and Bernardo, on their watch, 196  
In the dead vast and middle of the night,  
Been thus encounter'd. A figure like your father,  
Armed at point, exactly, cap-a-pe,  
Appears before them, and with solemn march 200  
Goes slow and stately by them: thrice he walk'd  
By their oppress'd and fear-surprised eyes,  
Within his truncheon's length; whilst they, distill'd  
Almost to jelly with the act of fear,  
Stand dumb, and speak not to him. This to me 205  
In dreadful secrecy impart they did;  
And I with them the third night kept the watch:  
Where, as they had deliver'd, both in time,  
Form of the thing, each word made true and good,  
The apparition comes: I knew your father; 210  
These hands are not more like.

*Hamlet.* But where was this?

*Marcellus.* My lord, upon the platform where we watch'd.

*Hamlet.* Did you not speak to it?

*Horatio.* My lord, I did;

But answer made it none: yet once methought  
It lifted up its head, and did address 215  
Itself to motion, like as it would speak:  
But even then the morning cock crew loud,  
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away,  
And vanish'd from our sight.

*Hamlet.* 'Tis very strange. 219

*Horatio.* As I do live, my honour'd lord, 'tis true;  
And we did think it writ down in our duty  
To let you know of it.

*Hamlet.* Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me.  
Hold you the watch to-night?

*Marcellus, Bernardo.* We do, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Arm'd, say you?

225

*Marcellus, Bernardo.* Arm'd, my lord.

*Hamlet.* From top to toe?

*Marcellus, Bernardo.* My lord, from head to foot.

*Hamlet.* Then saw you not his face?

*Horatio.* O, yes, my lord; he wore his beaver up.

*Hamlet.* What, look'd he frowningly?

230

*Horatio.* A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

*Hamlet.* Pale or red?

*Horatio.* Nay, very pale. \ | ~

*Hamlet.* And fix'd his eyes upon you?

*Horatio.* Most constantly.

*Hamlet.* I would I had been there.

*Horatio.* It would have much amazed you.

235

*Hamlet.* Very like, very like. Stay'd it long?

*Horatio.* While one with moderate haste might tell a  
hundred.

*Marcellus, Bernardo.* Longer, longer.

*Horatio.* Not when I saw't.

*Hamlet.* His beard was grizzled? no?

*Horatio.* It was, as I have seen it in his life,  
A sable silver'd.

240

*Hamlet.* I will watch to-night;  
Perchance 'twill walk again.

*Horatio.* I warrant it will.

*Hamlet.* If it assume my noble father's person,  
I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape  
And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,  
If you have hitherto conceal'd this sight,  
Let it be tenable in your silence still;

245



And whatsoever else shall hap to-night,  
 Give it an understanding, but no tongue:  
 I will requite your loves. So, fare you well:  
 Upon the platform, 'twixt eleven and twelve,  
 I'll visit you.

250

*All.* Our duty to your honour.

*Hamlet.* Your loves, as mine to you: farewell.

[*Exeunt Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo.*]

My father's spirit in arms! all is not well; 254  
 I doubt some foul play: would the night were come!  
 Till then sit still, my soul: foul deeds will rise,  
 Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes. [*Exit.*]

### SCENE III. *A room in Polonius' house.*

*Enter LAERTES and OPHELIA.*

*Laertes.* My necessities are embark'd: farewell:  
 And, sister, as the winds give benefit,  
 And convoy is assistant, do not sleep,  
 But let me hear from you.

*Ophelia.* Do you doubt that?

*Laertes.* For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour, 5  
 Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood;  
 A violet in the youth of primy nature,  
 Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,  
 The perfume and suppliance of a minute;  
 No more.

*Oph.* No more but so?

*Laertes.* Think it no more: 10

For nature, crescent, does not grow alone

In thews and bulk ; but, as this temple waxes,  
The inward service of the mind and soul  
Grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now,  
And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch  
The virtue of his will : but you must fear,  
His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own :  
For he himself is subject to his birth :

15

He may not, as unvalued persons do,  
Carve for himself ; for on his choice depends  
The safety and health of this whole state ;

20

And therefore must his choice be circumscribed  
Unto the voice and yielding of that body  
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,  
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it,

25

As he in his particular act and place  
May give his saying deed ; which is no further  
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.  
Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain,  
If with too credent ear you list his songs ;

30

Or lose your heart.  
Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,  
And keep you in the rear of your affection,  
Out of the shot and danger of desire.

35

The chariest maid is prodigal enough,  
If she unmask her beauty to the moon :  
Virtue itself scapes not calumnious strokes ;  
The canker galls the infants of the spring,  
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed ;  
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth  
Contagious blastments are most imminent.

40

Be wary, then ; best safety lies in fear :  
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near

*Ophelia.* I shall the effect of this good lesson keep,



As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother, 45  
 Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,  
 Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven; *2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 or 9 or 10 or 11 or 12 or 13 or 14 or 15 or 16 or 17 or 18 or 19 or 20 or 21 or 22 or 23 or 24 or 25 or 26 or 27 or 28 or 29 or 30 or 31 or 32 or 33 or 34 or 35 or 36 or 37 or 38 or 39 or 40 or 41 or 42 or 43 or 44 or 45 or 46 or 47 or 48 or 49 or 50 or 51 or 52 or 53 or 54 or 55 or 56 or 57 or 58 or 59 or 60 or 61 or 62 or 63 or 64 or 65 or 66 or 67 or 68 or 69 or 70 or 71 or 72 or 73 or 74 or 75 or 76 or 77 or 78 or 79 or 80 or 81 or 82 or 83 or 84 or 85 or 86 or 87 or 88 or 89 or 90 or 91 or 92 or 93 or 94 or 95 or 96 or 97 or 98 or 99 or 100*  
 Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,  
 Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,  
 And recks not his own rede. *advice.*

*Laertes.*

O, fear me not.

50

I stay too long: but here my father comes.

*Enter* POLONIUS.

A double blessing is a double grace;  
 Occasion smiles upon a second leave.

*Polonius.* Yet here, Laertes! aboard, aboard, for shame!  
 The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail, 55  
 And you are stay'd for. There, my blessing with thee!

*[Laying his hand on Laertes' head.]*

And these few precepts in thy memory  
 See thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,  
 Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.  
 Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.  
The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;  
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment  
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledged comrade. Beware  
 Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,  
 Bear't, that the opposed may beware of thee.  
 Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice:  
 Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.  
 Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
 But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy:  
 For the apparel oft proclaims the man;  
 And they in France of the best rank and station  
 Are most select and generous, chief in that.

60

65

70

Neither a borrower nor a lender be:  
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.

75

This above all: to thine ownself be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.  
Farewell: my blessing season this in thee!

80

*Laertes.* Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

*Polonius.* The time invites you; go, your servants tend.

*Laertes.* Farewell, Ophelia; and remember well  
What I have said to you.

*Ophelia.* 'Tis in my memory lock'd,  
And you yourself shall keep the key of it.

85

*Laertes.* Farewell.

[Exit.

*Polonius.* What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?

*Oph.* So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

*Polonius.* Marry, well bethought:

'Tis told me, he hath very oft of late

90

Given private time to you, and you yourself

Have of your audience been most free and bounteous:

If it be so,—as so 'tis put on me,

And that in way of caution,—I must tell you,

You do not understand yourself so clearly

95

As it behoves my daughter and your honour.

What is between you? give me up the truth.

*Ophelia.* He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders  
Of his affection to me.

*Pol.* Affection! pooh! you speak like a green girl,  
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.

100

Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?

*Ophelia.* I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

*Polonius.* Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself a baby,  
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,

105

(To be over)



Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly;  
Or—not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,  
Running it thus—you'll tender me a fool.

*Ophelia.* My lord, he hath importuned me with love  
In honourable fashion. (temporary) 110

*Polonius.* Ay, fashion you may call it; go to, go to.

*Ophelia.* And hath given countenance to his speech,  
my lord,

With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

*Polonius.* Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do know,  
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul 115

Lends the tongue vows: these blazes, daughter,  
Giving more light than heat,—extinct in both,

Even in their promise, as it is a-making,—

You must not take for fire. From this time

Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence;

120

Set your entreatments at a higher rate

Than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet,

Believe so much in him, that he is young,

And with a larger tether may he walk

Than may be given you: in few, Ophelia,

125

Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers,

Not of that dye which their investments show,

But mere implorators of unholy suits,

Breathing like sanctified and pious bonds,

The better to beguile. This is for all:

130

I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,

Have you so slander any moment leisure

As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.

Look to't, I charge you: come your ways.

*Ophelia.* I shall obey, my lord.

135

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV. *The platform before the castle.**Enter HAMLET, HORATIO, and MARCELLUS.**Hamlet.* The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold.*Horatio.* It is a nipping and an eager air.*Hamlet.* What hour now?*Horatio.* I think it lacks of twelve.*Marcellus.* No, it is struck.*Horatio.* Indeed? I heard it not: then it draws near  
the season

5

Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.

*[A flourish of trumpets, and ordnance shot off, within.]*

What does this mean, my lord?

*Hamlet.* The king doth wake to-night and takes his rouse,  
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels;

And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,

10

The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out

The triumph of his pledge.*Horatio.* Is it a custom?*Hamlet.* Ay, marry, is't:

But to my mind, though I am native here

And to the manner born, it is a custom

15

More honour'd in the breach than the observance.

This heavy-headed revel east and west

Makes us traduced and tax'd of other nations:

They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase

Soil our addition; and indeed it takes

20

From our achievements, though perform'd at height,

The pith and marrow of our attribute.

So, oft it chances in particular men,

That for some vicious mole of nature in them,



As, in their birth,—wherein they are not guilty, 25  
 Since nature cannot choose his origin,—  
 By the o'ergrowth of some complexion, (*human one*  
 Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason, (*in London sense*)  
 Or by some habit that too much o'er-leavens  
 The form of plausible manners;—that these men,— 30  
 Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,  
 Being nature's livery, or fortune's star,— *humanal garment*  
 Their virtues else—be they as pure as grace, (*human*)  
 As infinite as man may undergo—  
 Shall in the general censure take corruption 35  
 From that particular fault: the dram of eale  
 Doth all the noble substance of a doubt  
 To his own scandal. (*little deal*)

*Horatio.*

Look, my lord, it comes!

*Enter Ghost.*

*Hamlet.* Angels and ministers of grace defend us!  
 Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd, 40  
 Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,  
 Be thy intents wicked or charitable,  
 Thou comest in such a questionable shape, *doubtful*  
 That I will speak to thee: I'll call thee Hamlet,  
 King, father, royal Dane: O, answer me! 45  
 Let me not burst in ignorance; but tell  
 Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,  
 Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre,  
 Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd,  
 Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws 50  
 To cast thee up again! What may this mean,  
 That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel  
 Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,

Making night hideous; and we fools of nature  
 So horridly to shake our disposition  
 With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?  
 Say, why is this? wherefore? what should we do?

55

[*Ghost beckons Hamlet.*

*Horatio.* It beckons you to go away with it,  
 As if it some impartment did desire  
 To you alone.

*Marcellus.* Look, with what courteous action  
 It waves you to a more removed ground:  
 But do not go with it.

60

*Horatio.* No, by no means.

*Hamlet.* It will not speak; then I will follow it.

*Horatio.* Do not, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Why, what should be the fear?  
 I do not set my life at a pin's fee;  
 And for my soul, what can it do to that,  
 Being a thing immortal as itself?  
 It waves me forth again; I'll follow it.

65

*Horatio.* What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,  
 Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff  
 That beetles o'er his base into the sea,  
 And there assume some other horrible form,  
 Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason,  
 And draw you into madness? think of it:  
 The very place puts toys of desperation,  
 Without more motive, into every brain  
 That looks so many fathoms to the sea  
 And hears it roar beneath.

*Comment 70*  
*Superior*

75

*Hamlet.* It waves me still.  
 Go on; I'll follow thee.

*Mar.* You shall not go, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Hold off your hands. 80



*Horatio.* Be ruled; you shall not go.

*Hamlet.*

My fate cries out,

And makes each petty artery in this body

As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.

Still am I call'd: unhand me, gentlemen;

By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me: 85

I say, away! Go on; I'll follow thee.

[*Exeunt Ghost and Hamlet.*

*Horatio.* He waxes desperate with imagination.

*Marcellus.* Let's follow; 'tis not fit thus to obey him.

*Horatio.* Have after. To what issue will this come?

*Mar.* Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. 90

*Horatio.* Heaven will direct it.

*Marcellus.*

Nay, let's follow him.

[*Exeunt.*

## SCENE V. *Another part of the platform.*

*Enter Ghost and HAMLET.*

*Hamlet.* Where wilt thou lead me? speak; I'll go no further.

*Ghost.* Mark me.

*Hamlet.* I will.

*Ghost.* My hour is almost come,  
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames  
Must render up myself.

*Hamlet.* Alas, poor ghost!

*Ghost.* Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing 5  
To what I shall unfold.

*Hamlet.* Speak; I am bound to hear.

*Ghost.* So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.

*Hamlet.* What?

*Ghost.* I am thy father's spirit;  
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night, 10  
And for the day confined to fast in fires,  
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature  
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid  
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,  
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word 15  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,  
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,  
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,  
And each particular hair to stand an end,  
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine: 20  
But this eternal blazon must not be  
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list!  
If thou didst ever thy dear father love,—

*Hamlet.* O God!

*Ghost.* Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. 25

*Hamlet.* Murder!

*Ghost.* Murder most foul, as in the best it is;  
But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

*Hamlet.* Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift  
As meditation or the thoughts of love, 30  
May sweep to my revenge.

*Ghost.* I find thee apt;  
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed  
That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,  
Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear:  
'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard, 35  
A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark  
Is by a forged process of my death  
Rankly abused: but know, thou noble youth,  
The serpent that did sting thy father's life



Now wears his crown.

*Hamlet.*

O my prophetic soul!

40

My uncle!

*Ghost.* Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,  
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,—

O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power

So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust

45

The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen:

O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!

From me, whose love was of that dignity,

That it went hand in hand even with the vow

I made to her in marriage; and to decline

50

Upon a wretch, whose natural gifts were poor

To those of mine!

But virtue, as it never will be moved,

Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,

So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,

55

Will sate itself in a celestial bed,

And prey on garbage.

But, soft! methinks I scent the morning air;

Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,

My custom always in the afternoon,

60

Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,

With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,

And in the porches of mine ears did pour

The leperous distilment; whose effect

Holds such an enmity with blood of man,

65

That swift as quicksilver it courses through

The natural gates and alleys of the body,

And with a sudden vigour it doth posset

And curd, like eager droppings into milk,

The thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine;

70

And a most instant tetter bark'd about,

Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust  
All my smooth body.

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand  
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd: 75  
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,  
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled;

No reckoning made, but sent to my account  
With all my imperfections on my head:  
O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible! 80

If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;

Let not the royal bed of Denmark be

A couch for luxury and damned incest.

But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,

Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive 85

Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven,

And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,

To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once!

The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,

And gins to pale his uneffectual fire: 90

Adieu, adieu, adieu! remember me. [Exit.

*Hamlet.* O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?

And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold my heart;

And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,

But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee! 95

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat

In this distracted globe. Remember thee!

Yea, from the table of my memory

I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,

All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, 100

That youth and observation copied there;

And thy commandment all alone shall live

Within the book and volume of my brain,

Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!



O most pernicious woman! 105  
 O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!  
 My tables,—meet it is I set it down,  
 That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;  
 At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark: [*Writing.*  
 So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word; 110  
 It is, "Adieu, adieu! remember me:"  
 I have sworn't.

*Hor.* } [*Within*] My lord, my lord!  
*Mar.* }

*Marcellus.*

Lord Hamlet!

*Horatio.*

Heaven secure him!

*Hamlet.* So be it!

*Horatio.* Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

115

*Hamlet.* Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come, bird, come.

*Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS.*

*Mar.* How is't, my noble lord?

*Horatio.*

What news, my lord?

*Hamlet.* O, wonderful!

*Horatio.*

Good my lord, tell it.

*Hamlet.* No; you'll reveal it.

119

*Horatio.* Not I, my lord, by heaven.

*Marcellus.*

Nor I, my lord.

*Hamlet.* How say you, then; would heart of man once  
 think it?

But you'll be secret?

*Horatio, Marcellus.* Ay, by heaven, my lord.

*Hamlet.* There's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark  
 But he's an arrant knave. 124

*Hor.* There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave  
 To tell us this.

*Hamlet.* Why, right! you are i' the right;

And so, without more circumstance at all,  
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part :  
You, as your business and desire shall point you,  
For every man hath business and desire, 130  
Such as it is ; and for mine own poor part,  
Look you, I'll go pray.

*Hor.* These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

*Hamlet.* I'm sorry they offend you, heartily ;  
Yes, faith, heartily.

*Horatio.* There's no offence, my lord. 135

*Hamlet.* Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,  
And much offence too. Touching this vision here,  
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you :  
For your desire to know what is between us,  
O'ermaster't as you may. And now, good friends, 140  
As you are friends, scholars and soldiers,  
Give me one poor request.

*Horatio.* What is't, my lord? we will.

*Ham.* Never make known what you have seen to-night.

*Hor., Mar.* My lord, we will not.

*Hamlet.*

Nay, but swear't.

*Horatio.*

My lord, not I.

In faith,

*Marcellus.* Nor I, my lord, in faith. 146

*Ham.* Upon my sword.

*Marcellus.*

We have sworn, my lord, already.

*Hamlet.* Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

*Ghost. [Beneath]* Swear.

*Hamlet.* Ah, ha, boy ! say'st thou so? art thou there,  
true-penny?— 150

Come on,—you hear this fellow in the cellarage,—  
Consent to swear.

*Horatio.* Propose the oath, my lord.



*Hamlet.* Never to speak of this that you have seen,  
Swear by my sword.

*Ghost.* [*Beneath*] Swear. 155

*Hamlet.* *Hic et ubique?* then we'll shift our ground.  
Come hither, gentlemen,  
And lay your hands again upon my sword:  
Never to speak of this that you have heard,  
Swear by my sword. 160

*Ghost.* [*Beneath*] Swear.

*Ham.* Well said, old mole! canst work i' the earth so fast?  
A worthy pioner! Once more remove, good friends.

*Horatio.* O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

*Hamlet.* And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.  
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, 166  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

But come;

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,  
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,— 170  
As I, perchance, hereafter shall think meet  
To put an antic disposition on,—

That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,  
With arms encumber'd thus, or this head-shake,  
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase, 175  
As "Well, well, we know," or "We could, an if we would,"  
Or "If we list to speak," or "There be, an if they might,"  
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note

That you know aught of me: this not to do,  
So grace and mercy at your most need help you, 180  
Swear.

*Ghost.* [*Beneath*] Swear.

*Hamlet.* Rest, rest, perturbed spirit! [*They swear*] So,  
gentlemen,

With all my love I do commend me to you:

And what so poor a man as Hamlet is  
May do to express his love and friending to you,  
God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together;  
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.

185

The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,

That ever I was born to set it right!

190

Nay, come, let's go together.

[*Exeunt.*]



27<sup>2</sup>3  
5

## ACT II.

SCENE I. *A room in Polonius' house.**Enter* POLONIUS *and* REYNALDO.*Pol.* Give him this money and these notes, Reynaldo.*Reynaldo.* I will, my lord.*Pol.* You shall do marvellous wisely, good Reynaldo,  
Before you visit him, to make inquiry  
Of his behaviour.*Reynaldo.* My lord, I did intend it. 5*Pol.* Marry, well said; very well said. Look you, sir,  
Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris;  
And how, and who, what means, and where they keep,  
What company, at what expense; and finding,  
By this encompassment and drift of question, 10  
That they do know my son, come you more nearer  
Than your particular demands will touch it:  
Take you, as 'twere, some distant knowledge of him;  
As thus, "I know his father and his friends,  
And in part him;" do you mark this, Reynaldo? 15*Reynaldo.* Ay, very well, my lord.*Pol.* "And in part him; but," you may say, "not well:  
But, if't be he I mean, he's very wild;  
Addicted so and so;" and there put on him  
What forgeries you please; marry, none so rank 20  
As may dishonour him; take heed of that;  
But, sir, such wanton, wild and usual slips

As are companions noted and most known  
To youth and liberty.

*Reynaldo.* As gaming, my lord.

24

*Polonius.* Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling:  
You may go so far; but breathe his faults so quaintly,  
That they may seem the taints of liberty,  
The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,  
A savageness in unreclaimed blood,  
Of general assault.

*Reynaldo.* But, my good lord,—

30

*Polonius.* Wherefore should you do this?

*Reynaldo.* Ay, my lord,  
I would know that.

*Polonius.* Marry, sir, here's my drift;  
And I believe it is a fetch of warrant:  
You laying these slight sullies on my son,  
As 'twere a thing a little soil'd i' the working,  
Mark you,  
Your party in converse, him you would sound,  
Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes  
The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured  
He closes with you in this consequence;  
"Good sir," or so, or "friend," or "gentleman,"  
According to the phrase or the addition  
Of man and country.

35

40

*Reynaldo.* Very good, my lord.

*Polonius.* And then, sir, does he this,—he does—  
What was I about to say? By the mass, I was  
About to say something: where did I leave?

45

*Reynaldo.* At "closes in the consequence,"  
At "friend or so," and "gentleman."

*Polonius.* At "closes in the consequence," ay, marry;  
He closes with you thus; "I know the gentleman;"

50



I saw him yesterday, or t'other day,  
 Or then, or then; with such, or such; and, as you say,  
 There was he gaming, there o'ertook in's rouse,  
 There falling out at tennis:" or perchance,  
 "I saw him enter such a house of sale." 55

See you now;

Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth:  
 And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,  
 With windlasses and with assays of bias,  
 By indirections find directions out: 60  
 So by my former lecture and advice  
 Shall you my son. You have me, have you not?

*Rey.* My lord, I have.

*Polonius.* God be wi' you! fare you well.

*Reynaldo.* Good my lord!

*Polonius.* Observe his inclination in yourself 65

*Reynaldo.* I shall, my lord.

*Polonius.* And let him ply his music.

*Reynaldo.* Well, my lord.

*Pol.* Farewell! [*Exit Reynaldo.*

*Enter OPHELIA.*

How now, Ophelia! what's the matter?

*Oph.* O, my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

*Polonius.* With what, i' the name of God? 70

*Ophelia.* My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,  
 Lord Hamlet,—with his doublet all unbraced,  
 No hat upon his head, his stockings foul'd,  
 Ungarter'd and down-gyved to his ancle;  
 Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other; 75  
 And with a look so piteous in purport  
 As if he had been loosed out of hell  
 To speak of horrors,—he comes before me.

*Polonius.* Mad for thy love?

*Ophelia.* My lord, I do not know;  
But, truly, I do fear it.

*Polonius.* What said he? 80

*Ophelia.* He took me by the wrist and held me hard;  
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;  
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,  
He falls to such perusal of my face  
As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;  
At last, a little shaking of mine arm  
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,  
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound,  
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk  
And end his being: that done, he lets me go:  
And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,  
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;  
For out o' doors he went without their help,  
And, to the last, bended their light on me. 85 90

*Polonius.* Come, go with me: I will go seek the king. 95  
This is the very ecstasy of love,  
Whose violent property fordoes itself,  
And leads the will to desperate undertakings,  
As oft as any passion under heaven  
That does afflict our natures. I am sorry. 100  
What, have you given him any hard words of late?

*Ophelia.* No, my good lord; but, as you did command,  
I did repel his letters, and denied  
His access to me.

*Polonius.* That hath made him mad.  
I am sorry that with better heed and judgment 105  
I had not quoted him: I fear'd he did but trifle,  
And meant to wreck thee; but, beshrew my jealousy!  
It seems it is as proper to our age



To cast beyond ourselves in our opinions,  
 As it is common for the younger sort 110  
 To lack discretion. Come, go we to the king:  
 This must be known; which, being kept close, might move  
 More grief to hide than hate to utter love.  
 Come. [Exeunt.]

SCENE II. *A room in the castle.*

*Enter King, Queen, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and Attendants.*

*King.* Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern!  
 Moreover that we much did long to see you,  
 The need we have to use you did provoke  
 Our hasty sending. Something have you heard  
 Of Hamlet's transformation; so I call it, 5  
 Sith nor the exterior nor the inward man  
 Resembles that it was. What it should be,  
 More than his father's death, that thus hath put him  
 So much from the understanding of himself, 10  
 I cannot dream of: I entreat you both,  
 That, being of so young days brought up with him,  
 And sith so neighbour'd to his youth and humour,  
 That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court  
 Some little time: so by your companies 15  
 To draw him on to pleasures, and to gather,  
 So much as from occasion you may glean,  
 Whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him thus,  
 That, open'd, lies within our remedy.

*Queen.* Good gentlemen, he hath much talk'd of you;  
 And sure I am two men there are not living 20

To whom he more adheres. If it will please you  
To show us so much gentry and good will  
As to expend your time with us awhile,  
For the supply and profit of our hope,  
Your visitation shall receive such thanks  
As fits a king's remembrance.

25

*Rosencrantz.*

Both your majesties

Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,  
Put your dread pleasures more into command  
Than to entreaty.

*Guildenstern.* But we both obey,  
And here give up ourselves, in the full bent  
To lay our service freely at your feet,  
To be commanded.

30

*King.* Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

*Queen.* Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz :  
And I beseech you instantly to visit  
My ~~too much~~ changed son. Go, some of you,  
And bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is.

35

*Guil.* Heavens make our presence and our practices  
Pleasant and helpful to him !

*Queen.*

Ay, amen !

[*Exeunt Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and some Attendants.*]

*Enter* POLONIUS.

*Pol.* The ambassadors from Norway, my good lord,  
Are joyfully return'd.

40

*King.* Thou still hast been the father of good news.

*Polonius.* Have I, my lord ? Assure you, my good liege,  
I hold my duty, as I hold my soul,  
Both to my God and to my gracious king :  
And I do think, or else this brain of mine

45



Hunts not the trail of policy so sure  
As it hath used to do, that I have found  
The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy.

*King.* O, speak of that; that do I long to hear. 50

*Polonius.* Give first admittance to the ambassadors;  
My news shall be the fruit to that great feast.

*King.* Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.

[*Exit Polonius.*]

He tells me, my dear Gertrude, he hath found  
The head and source of all your son's distemper. 55

*Queen.* I doubt it is no other but the main;  
His father's death, and our o'erhasty marriage.

*King.* Well, we shall sift him.

*Re-enter POLONIUS, with VOLTIMAND and CORNELIUS.*

Welcome, my good friends!

Say, Voltimand, what from our brother Norway?

*Voltimand.* Most fair return of greetings and desires. 60

Upon our first, he sent out to suppress  
His nephew's levies; which to him appear'd  
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack;  
But, better look'd into, he truly found

It was against your highness: whereat grieved, 65

That so his sickness, age and impotence,  
Was falsely borne in hand, sends out arrests

On Fortinbras; which he, in brief, obeys;  
Receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine

Makes vow before his uncle never more 70

To give the assay of arms against your majesty.

Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,

Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee,

And his commission to employ those soldiers,

So levied as before, against the Polack: 75  
With an entreaty, herein further shown, [*Gives a paper.*  
That it might please you to give quiet pass  
Through your dominions for this enterprise,  
On such regards of safety and allowance  
As therein are set down.

*King.* It likes us well; 80  
And at our more consider'd time we'll read,  
Answer, and think upon this business.  
Meantime we thank you for your well-took labour:  
Go to your rest; at night we'll feast together:  
Most welcome home! [*Exeunt Voltimand and Cornelius.*

*Polonius.* This business is well ended. 85  
My liege, and madam, to expostulate  
What majesty should be, what duty is,  
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,  
Were nothing but to waste night, day and time.  
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit, 90  
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,  
I will be brief: your noble son is mad:  
Mad call I it; for, to define true madness,  
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?  
But let that go.

*Queen.* More matter, with less art. 95

*Polonius.* Madam, I swear I use no art at all.  
That he is mad, 'tis true: 'tis true 'tis pity,  
And pity 'tis 'tis true: a foolish figure;  
But farewell it, for I will use no art.  
Mad let us grant him, then: and now remains 100  
That we find out the cause of this effect,  
Or rather say, the cause of this defect,  
For this effect defective comes by cause:  
Thus it remains, and the remainder thus.



Perpend.

105

I have a daughter,—have whilst she is mine,—  
Who, in her duty and obedience, mark,

Hath given me this: now gather, and surmise. [*Reads.*

“To the celestial and my soul’s idol, the most beautified  
Ophelia,”—

110

That’s an ill phrase, a vile phrase; “beautified” is a vile  
phrase: but you shall hear. Thus: [*Reads.*

“In her excellent white bosom, these,” &c.—

*Queen.* Came this from Hamlet to her?

*Polonius.* Good madam, stay awhile; I will be faithful.  
[*Reads.*

“Doubt thou the stars are fire;

116

Doubt that the sun doth move;

Doubt truth to be a liar;

But never doubt I love.

“O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers; I have  
not art to reckon my groans: but that I love thee best,  
O most best, believe it. Adieu.

“Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this  
machine is to him, HAMLET.”

This, in obedience, hath my daughter shown me: 125

And more above, hath his solicitings,

As they fell out by time, by means and place,

All given to mine ear.

*King.* But how hath she

Received his love?

*Polonius.* What do you think of me?

*King.* As of a man faithful and honourable. 130

*Pol.* I would fain prove so. But what might you think,  
When I had seen this hot love on the wing,—  
As I perceived it, I must tell you that,  
Before my daughter told me,—what might you,

Or my dear majesty your queen here, think,  
If I had play'd the desk or table-book,  
Or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb,  
Or look'd upon this love with idle sight;  
What might you think? No, I went round to work,  
And my young mistress thus I did bespeak:  
"Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star;  
This must not be:" and then I prescripts gave her,  
That she should lock herself from his resort,  
Admit no messengers, receive no tokens.  
Which done, she took the fruits of my advice;  
And he, repulsed,—a short tale to make,—  
Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,  
Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,  
Thence to a lightness, and by this declension  
Into the madness wherein now he raves,  
And all we mourn for.

*King.* Do you think 'tis this?

*Queen.* It may be, very likely.

*Pol.* Hath there been such a time—I'd fain know that—  
That I have positively said "'Tis so,"  
When it proved otherwise?

*King.* Not that I know.

*Polonius.* [*Pointing to his head and shoulder*] Take this  
from this, if this be otherwise:

If circumstances lead me, I will find  
Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed  
Within the centre.

*King.* How may we try it further?

*Pol.* You know, sometimes he walks four hours together  
Here in the lobby.

*Queen.* So he does, indeed.

*Pol.* At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him:



Be you and I behind an arras then ;  
— Mark the encounter : if he love her not,  
And be not from his reason fall'n thereon, 165  
Let me be no assistant for a state,  
But keep a farm and carters.

*King.* We will try it.

*Queen.* But, look, where sadly the poor wretch comes  
reading.

*Polonius.* Away, I do beseech you, both away :  
I'll board him presently.

[*Exeunt King, Queen, and Attendants.*]

*Enter HAMLET, reading.*

O, give me leave. 170

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

*Hamlet.* Well, God-a-mercy.

*Polonius.* Do you know me, my lord?

*Hamlet.* Excellent well ; you are a fishmonger.

*Polonius.* Not I, my lord. 175

*Hamlet.* Then I would you were so honest a man.

*Polonius.* Honest, my lord !

*Hamlet.* Ay, sir ; to be honest, as this world goes, is to  
be one man picked out of ten thousand.

*Polonius.* That's very true, my lord. 180

*Hamlet.* For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog,  
being a good kissing carrion,—Have you a daughter?

*Polonius.* I have, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Let her not walk i' the sun : friend, look to't.

*Polonius.* [*Aside*] How say you by that? Still harping  
on my daughter : yet he knew me not at first ; he said I  
was a fishmonger : he is far gone, far gone : and truly in  
my youth I suffered much extremity for love ; very near  
this. I'll speak to him again.—What do you read, my lord?

*Hamlet.* Words, words, words.

*Polonius.* What is the matter, my lord?

190

*Hamlet.* Between who?

*Polonius.* I mean, the matter that you read, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here, that old men have gray beards; that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum; and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams: all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down; for you yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backward.

201

*Polonius.* [*Aside*] Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.—Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

*Hamlet.* Into my grave?

*Polonius.* Indeed, that is out o' the air.—[*Aside*] How pregnant sometimes his replies are! a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of. I will leave him, and suddenly contrive the means of meeting between him and my daughter.—My honourable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you.

211

*Hamlet.* You cannot, sir, take from me any thing that I will more willingly part withal: except my life, except my life, except my life.

*Polonius.* Fare you well, my lord.

*Hamlet.* These tedious old fools!

215

*Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.*

*Polonius.* You go to seek the Lord Hamlet; there he is.

*Ros.* [*To Polonius*] God save you, sir! [*Exit Polonius.*

*Guildenstern.* My honoured lord!



*Rosencrantz.* My most dear lord ! 220

*Hamlet.* My excellent good friends ! How dost thou, Guildenstern ? Ah, Rosencrantz ! Good lads, how do ye both ?

*Rosencrantz.* As the indifferent children of the earth.

*Guildenstern.* Happy, in that we are not overhappy ;  
On Fortune's cap we are not the very button. 226

*Hamlet.* Nor the soles of her shoe ?

*Rosencrantz.* Neither, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Then you live in the middle of her favours.  
What's the news ? 230

*Ros.* None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.

*Hamlet.* Then is doomsday near : but your news is not true. Let me question more in particular : what have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune, that she sends you to prison hither ? 235

*Guildenstern.* Prison, my lord !

*Hamlet.* Denmark's a prison.

*Rosencrantz.* Then is the world one.

*Ham.* A goodly one ; in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst. 240

*Rosencrantz.* We think not so, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Why, then, 'tis none to you : for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so : to me it is a prison.

*Rosencrantz.* Why, then, your ambition makes it one ; 'tis too narrow for your mind. 246

*Hamlet.* O God, I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

*Guil.* Which dreams, indeed, are ambition ; for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

*Hamlet.* A dream itself is but a shadow. 252



*Rosencrantz.* Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality, that it is but a shadow's shadow.

*Hamlet.* Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows. Shall we to the court? for, by my fay, I cannot reason. 257

*Rosencrantz, Guildenstern.* We'll wait upon you.

*Hamlet.* No such matter: I will not sort you with the rest of my servants; for, to speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended. But, in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore? 262

*Rosencrantz.* To visit you, my lord; no other occasion.

*Hamlet.* Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I thank you: and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me: come, come; nay, speak. 268

*Guildenstern.* What should we say, my lord?

*Hamlet.* Why, any thing, but to the purpose. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to colour: I know the good king and queen have sent for you.

*Rosencrantz.* To what end, my lord? 274

*Hamlet.* That you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for, or no? 280

*Rosencrantz.* [*Aside to Guildenstern*] What say you?

*Hamlet.* [*Aside*] Nay, then, I have an eye of you.—If you love me, hold not off.

*Guildenstern.* My lord, we were sent for. 284

*Hamlet.* I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation



prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen moult no feather. I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me; no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so. 301

*Ros.* My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

*Hamlet.* Why did you laugh, then, when I said “man delights not me”?

*Rosencrantz.* To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you: we coted them on the way; and hither are they coming, to offer you service. 308

*Hamlet.* He that plays the king shall be welcome; his majesty shall have tribute of me; the adventurous knight shall use his foil and target; the lover shall not sigh gratis; the humorous man shall end his part in peace; the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickle o’ the sere; and the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for’t. What players are they? 315

*Rosencrantz.* Even those you were wont to take such delight in, the tragedians of the city.



*Hamlet.* How chances it they travel? their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.

*Rosencrantz.* I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation. 321

*Hamlet.* Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? are they so followed?

*Rosencrantz.* No, indeed, are they not.

*Hamlet.* How comes it? do they grow rusty? 325

*Rosencrantz.* Nay, their endeavour keeps in the wonted pace: but there is, sir, an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for't: these are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages,—so they call them,—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills, and dare scarce come thither. 332

*Hamlet.* What, are they children? who maintains 'em? how are they escoted? Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing? will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common players,—as it is most like, if their means are no better,—their writers do them wrong, to make them exclaim against their own succession? 339

*Ros.* Faith, there has been much to do on both sides; and the nation holds it no sin to tarre them to controversy: there was, for a while, no money bid for argument, unless the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question.

*Hamlet.* Is't possible?

*Guil.* O, there has been much throwing about of brains.

*Hamlet.* Do the boys carry it away? 346

*Ros.* Ay, that they do, my lord; Hercules and his load too.

*Hamlet.* It is not very strange; for my uncle is king of Denmark, and those that would make mows at him while my father lived, give twenty, forty, fifty, an hundred ducats



a-piece for his picture in little. 'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out.

[*Flourish of trumpets within.*

*Guildestern.* There are the players. 353

*Hamlet.* Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands, come then : the appurtenance of welcome is fashion and ceremony : let me comply with you in this garb, lest my extent to the players, which, I tell you, must show fairly outward, should more appear like entertainment than yours. You are welcome : but my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived. 360

*Guildestern.* In what, my dear lord?

*Hamlet.* I am but mad north-north-west : when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw.

*Enter* POLONIUS.

*Polonius.* Well be with you, gentlemen ! 364

*Hamlet.* Hark you, Guildestern ; and you too ; at each ear a hearer : that great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling-clouts.

*Rosencrantz.* Happily he's the second time come to them ; for they say an old man is twice a child. 369

*Hamlet.* I will prophesy he comes to tell me of the players ; mark it. You say right, sir : o' Monday morning ; 'twas so indeed.

*Polonius.* My lord, I have news to tell you.

*Hamlet.* My lord, I have news to tell you. When Roscius was an actor in Rome,— 375

*Polonius.* The actors are come hither, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Buz, buz !

*Polonius.* Upon my honour,—

*Hamlet.* Then came each actor on his ass,— 379

*Polonius.* The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited: Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men. 385

*Hamlet.* O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

*Polonius.* What treasure had he, my lord?

*Hamlet.* Why,

“One fair daughter, and no more, 390  
The which he loved passing well.”

*Polonius.* [*Aside*] Still on my daughter.

*Hamlet.* Am I not i' the right, old Jephthah?

*Polonius.* If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter that I love passing well. 395

*Hamlet.* Nay, that follows not.

*Polonius.* What follows, then, my lord?

*Hamlet.* Why,

“As by lot, God wot,”  
and then, you know, 400

“It came to pass, as most like it was,”—  
the first row of the pious chanson will show you more; for look, where my abridgment comes.

*Enter four or five Players.*

You are welcome, masters; welcome, all; I am glad to see thee well. Welcome, good friends. O, my old friend! thy face is valanced since I saw thee last; comest thou to beard me in Denmark? What, my young lady and mistress; by'r lady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last by the altitude of a chopine. Pray God, your



voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring. Masters, you are all welcome. We'll e'en to't like French falconers, fly at any thing we see: we'll have a speech straight: come, give us a taste of your quality: come, a passionate speech.

*First Player.* What speech, my lord? 415

*Hamlet.* I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted; or, if it was, not above once; for the play, I remember, pleased not the million; 'twas caviare to the general: but it was—as I received it, and others, whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine—an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning. I remember, one said there were no sallets in the lines to make the matter savoury, nor no matter in the phrase that might indict the author of affection: but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine. One speech in it I chiefly loved: 'twas Æneas' tale to Dido; and thereabout of it especially where he speaks of Priam's slaughter: if it live in your memory, begin at this line: let me see, let me see; 430

“The rugged Pyrrhus, like the Hyrcanian beast,”  
—'tis not so:—it begins with Pyrrhus;

“The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,  
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble  
When he lay couched in the ominous horse, 435  
Hath now this dread and black complexion smear'd  
With heraldry more dismal; head to foot  
Now is he total gules; horridly trick'd  
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,  
Baked and impasted with the parching streets, 440  
That lend a tyrannous and damned light  
To their lord's murder: roasted in wrath and fire,



And thus o'er-sized with coagulate gore,  
With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus  
Old grandsire Priam seeks."—

445

So, proceed you.

*Polonius.* 'Fore God, my lord, well spoken, with good  
accent and good discretion.

*First Player.*

"Anon he finds him

Striking too short at Greeks; his antique sword, 450  
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,  
Repugnant to command: unequal match'd,  
Pyrrhus at Priam drives; in rage strikes wide;  
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword  
The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium,  
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top 456  
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash  
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear: for, lo! his sword,  
Which was declining on the milky head  
Of reverend Priam, seem'd i' the air to stick: 460  
So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,  
And, like a neutral to his will and matter,  
Did nothing.

But, as we often see, against some storm,  
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still, 465  
The bold winds speechless, and the orb below  
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder  
Doth rend the region; so, after Pyrrhus' pause,  
Aroused vengeance sets him new a-work;  
And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall 470.  
On Mars's armour, forg'd for proof eterne,  
With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword  
Now falls on Priam. Out, Fortune! All you gods,  
In general synod, take away her power;  
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel, 475



And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven,  
As low as to the fiends!"

*Polonius.* This is too long.

*Hamlet.* It shall to the barber's, with your beard.  
Prithee, say on: he's for a jig or a tale, or he sleeps: say  
on; come to Hecuba. 481

*First Player.* "But who, O, who had seen the mobled  
queen—"

*Hamlet.* "The mobled queen"?

*Polonius.* That's good; "mobled queen" is good.

*First Player.* "Run barefoot up and down, threatening  
the flames 485

With bisson rheum; a clout upon that head  
Where late the diadem stood, and for a robe,  
About her lank and all o'er-teemed loins,  
A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up; 489  
Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steep'd,  
'Gainst Fortune's state would treason have pronounced:  
But if the gods themselves did see her then,  
When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport  
In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,  
The instant burst of clamour that she made— 495  
Unless things mortal move them not at all—  
Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,  
And passion in the gods."

*Polonius.* Look, whether he has not turned his colour,  
and has tears in's eyes. Pray you, no more. 500

*Hamlet.* 'Tis well; I'll have thee speak out the rest  
soon. Good my lord, will you see the players well be-  
stowed? Do you hear, let them be well used; for they are  
the abstract and brief chronicles of the time: after your  
death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill  
report while you live. 506

*Pol.* My lord, I will use them according to their desert.

*Hamlet.* God's bodykins, man, much better: use every man after his desert, and who should scape whipping? Use them after your own honour and dignity: the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty. Take them in.

*Polonius.* Come, sirs.

512

*Ham.* Follow him, friends: we'll hear a play to-morrow.

*[Exit Polonius with all the Players except the First.]*  
Dost thou hear me, old friend; can you play the Murder of Gonzago?

515

*First Player.* Ay, my lord.

*Hamlet.* We'll ha't to-morrow night. You could, for a need, study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines, which I would set down and insert in't, could you not?

*First Player.* Ay, my lord.

520

*Hamlet.* Very well. Follow that lord; and look you mock him not. *[Exit First Player]* My good friends, I'll leave you till night: you are welcome to Elsinore.

*Rosencrantz.* Good my lord!

*Ham.* Ay, so, God be wi' ye! *[Exeunt Rosen. and Guil.]*

Now I am alone.

525

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!  
Is it not monstrous, that this player here,  
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
Could force his soul so to his own conceit,  
That from her working all his visage wann'd,  
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,  
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting  
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!  
For Hecuba!

530

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
That he should weep for her? What would he do,  
Had he the motive and the cue for passion

535



That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,  
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,  
Make mad the guilty and appal the free, 540  
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed  
The very faculties of eyes and ears.

Yet I,

A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,  
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause, 545  
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,  
Upon whose property and most dear life  
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?  
Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?  
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face? 550  
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat,  
As deep as to the lungs? who does me this, ha?  
'Swounds, I should take it: for it cannot be  
But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall  
To make oppression bitter, or ere this 555  
I should have fatted all the region kites  
With this slave's offal: bloody, bloody villain!  
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!  
O, vengeance!

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave, 560  
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
Must, like a shrew, unpack my heart with words,  
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,  
A scullion! 565

Fie upon't! foh! About, my brain! I have heard  
That guilty creatures sitting at a play  
Have by the very cunning of the scene  
Been struck so to the soul, that presently  
They have proclaim'd their malefactions; 570

For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak  
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players  
Play something like the murder of my father  
Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;  
I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,  
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen  
May be the devil: and the devil hath power  
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps  
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
As he is very potent with such spirits,  
Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds  
More relative than this: the play's the thing  
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. ✓

575

580

[Exit.



## ACT III.

SCENE I. *A room in the castle.*

*Enter* King, Queen, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ,  
and GUILDENSTERN.

*King.* And can you, by no drift of circumstance,  
Get from him why he puts on this confusion,  
Grating so harshly all his days of quiet  
With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?

*Ros.* He does confess he feels himself distracted; 5  
But from what cause he will by no means speak.

*Guil.* Nor do we find him forward to be sounded:  
But, with a crafty madness, keeps aloof,  
When we would bring him on to some confession  
Of his true state.

*Queen.* Did he receive you well? 10

*Rosencrantz.* Most like a gentleman.

*Guildenstern.* But with much forcing of his disposition.

*Rosencrantz.* Niggard of question; but, of our demands,  
Most free in his reply.

*Queen.* Did you assay him 15  
To any pastime?

*Rosencrantz.* Madam, it so fell out, that certain players  
We o'er-raught on the way: of these we told him;  
And there did seem in him a kind of joy  
To hear of it: they are about the court;  
And, as I think, they have already order 20

This night to play before him.

*Polonius.*

'Tis most true:

And he beseech'd me to entreat your majesties  
To hear and see the matter.

*King.* With all my heart; and it doth much content me  
To hear him so inclined. 25

Good gentlemen, give him a further edge,  
And drive his purpose on to these delights.

*Ros.* We shall, my lord.

[*Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.*]

*King.*

Sweet Gertrude, leave us too;

For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,  
That he, as 'twere by accident, may here  
Affront Ophelia: 30

Her father and myself, lawful espials,  
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing, unseen,  
We may of their encounter frankly judge,  
And gather by him, as he is behaved,  
If't be the affliction of his love or no 35  
That thus he suffers for.

*Queen.*

I shall obey you:

And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish  
That your good beauties be the happy cause  
Of Hamlet's wildness: so shall I hope your virtues 40  
Will bring him to his wonted way again,  
To both your honours.

*Ophelia.*

Madam, I wish it may. [*Exit Queen.*]

*Pol.* Ophelia, walk you here. Gracious, so please you,  
We will bestow ourselves. [*To Ophelia*] Read on this book;  
That show of such an exercise may colour 45  
Your loneliness. We are oft to blame in this,—

'Tis too much proved,—that with devotion's visage  
And pious action we do sugar o'er



The devil himself.

*King.* [*Aside*] O, 'tis too true!

How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience! 50  
The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,  
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it  
Than is my deed to my most painted word:  
O heavy burden!

*Polonius.* I hear him coming: let's withdraw, my lord.  
[*Exeunt King and Polonius.*]

*Enter HAMLET.*

*Hamlet.* To be, or not to be: that is the question: 56  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep; 60  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;  
To sleep! perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub; 65  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause: there's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life;  
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, 70  
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make 75  
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,

But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action. Soft you now!  
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons  
Be all my sins remember'd.

80

85

*Ophelia.* Good my lord,  
How does your honour for this many a day? 90

*Hamlet.* I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

*Ophelia.* My lord, I have remembrances of yours,  
That I have longed long to re-deliver;  
I pray you, now receive them.

*Hamlet.* No, not I;  
I never gave you aught. 95

*Ophelia.* My honour'd lord, you know right well you did;  
And, with them, words of so sweet breath composed  
As made the things more rich: their perfume lost,  
Take these again; for to the noble mind  
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.  
There, my lord. 100

*Hamlet.* Ha, ha! are you honest?

*Ophelia.* My lord?

*Hamlet.* Are you fair?

*Ophelia.* What means your lordship? 105

*Hamlet.* That if you be honest and fair, your honesty  
should admit no discourse to your beauty.



*Ophelia.* Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty? 110

*Hamlet.* Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness: this was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once. 115

*Ophelia.* Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

*Hamlet.* You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock, but we shall relish of it: I loved you not.

*Ophelia.* I was the more deceived. 120

*Hamlet.* Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest: but yet I could accuse me of such things, that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. (Where's your father?) 130

*Ophelia.* At home, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in's own house. Farewell.

*Ophelia.* O, help him, you sweet heavens! 134

*Hamlet.* If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool: for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go; and quickly too. Farewell.

*Ophelia.* O heavenly powers, restore him! 141



## HAMLET.

*Hamlet.* I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages: those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go. [*Exit.*

*Ophelia.* O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! 150  
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword;  
 The expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
 The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
 The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!  
 And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, 155  
 That suck'd the honey of his music vows,  
 Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,  
 Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;  
 That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth  
 Blasted with ecstasy: O, woe is me 160  
 To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

*Re-enter King and POLONIUS.*

*King.* Love! his affections do not that way tend;  
 Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little,  
 Was not like madness. There's something in his soul,  
 O'er which his melancholy sits on brood; 165  
 And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose  
 Will be some danger: which for to prevent,  
 I have in quick determination  
 Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England,  
 For the demand of our neglected tribute: 170  
 Haply, the seas, and countries different,



With variable objects, shall expel  
 This something-settled matter in his heart;  
 Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus  
 From fashion of himself. What think you on't? 175

*Polonius.* It shall do well: but yet do I believe  
 The origin and commencement of his grief  
 Sprung from neglected love. How now, Ophelia!  
 You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said;  
 We heard it all. My lord, do as you please; 180  
 But, if you hold it fit, after the play,  
 Let his queen mother all alone entreat him  
 To show his grief: let her be round with him;  
 And I'll be placed, so please you, in the ear  
 Of all their conference. If she find him not, 185  
 To England send him, or confine him where  
 Your wisdom best shall think.

*King.* It shall be so:  
 Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *A hall in the same.*

*Enter HAMLET and several Players.*

*Hamlet.* Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced  
 it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it, <sup>stare at</sup>  
 as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier <sup>as a</sup>  
 spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with <sup>way</sup>  
 your hand, thus, but use all gently: for in the very torrent,  
 tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion,  
 you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give  
 it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a  
 robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters,



to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise: I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant; it out-herods Herod: pray you, avoid it.

*First Player.* I warrant your honour.

*Hamlet.* Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now, this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. O, there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly, not to speak it profanely, that, neither having the accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed, that I have thought some of nature's journey-men had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

*First Player.* I hope we have reformed that indifferently with us, sir.

*Hamlet.* O, reform it altogether. And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them: for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too; though, in the mean time, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered: that's villanous, and



shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.  
Go, make you ready. *[Exeunt Players.]*

*Enter* POLONIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN.

How now, my lord! will the king hear this piece of work?

*Polonius.* And the queen too, and that presently. 46

*Hamlet.* Bid the players make haste. *[Exit Polonius]*  
Will you two help to hasten them?

*Rosencrantz, Guildenstern.* We will, my lord.

*[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]*

*Hamlet.* What, ho, Horatio! 50

*Enter* HORATIO.

*Horatio.* Here, sweet lord, at your service.

*Hamlet.* Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man  
As e'er my conversation coped withal.

*Horatio.* O, my dear lord,—

*Hamlet.* Nay, do not think I flatter;  
For what advancement may I hope from thee, 55  
That no revenue hast but thy good spirits,  
To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flatter'd?  
No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,  
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee  
Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear? 60  
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,  
And could of men distinguish, her election  
Hath seal'd thee for herself: for thou hast been  
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,  
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards 65  
Hast ta'en with equal thanks: and bless'd are those  
Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,  
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger

To sound what stop she please. Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,  
As I do thee.—Something too much of this.—

70

There is a play to-night before the king;  
One scene of it comes near the circumstance  
Which I have told thee of my father's death:

75

I prithee, when thou seest that act a-foot,  
Even with the very comment of thy soul  
Observe my uncle: if his occulted guilt

Do not itself unkennel in one speech,  
It is a damned ghost that we have seen,

80

And my imaginations are as foul  
As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note:

For I mine eyes will rivet to his face;  
And, after, we will both our judgments join  
In censure of his seeming.

*Horatio.*

Well, my lord:

85

If he steal aught the whilst this play is playing,  
And scape detecting, I will pay the theft.

*Hamlet.* They are coming to the play; I must be idle:  
Get you a place.

*Danish march. A flourish. Enter King, Queen, POLONIUS,  
OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others.*

*King.* How fares our cousin Hamlet?

90

*Hamlet.* Excellent, i' faith; of the chameleon's dish: I  
eat the air, promise-crammed: you cannot feed capons so.

*King.* I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet; these  
words are not mine.

*Hamlet.* No, nor mine now. [*To Polonius*] My lord,  
you played once i' the university, you say?

96



*Polonius.* That did I, my lord; and was accounted a good actor.

*Hamlet.* And what did you enact?

*Polonius.* I did enact Julius Cæsar; I was killed i' the Capitol; Brutus killed me. 101

*Hamlet.* It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. Be the players ready?

*Rosencrantz.* Ay, my lord; they stay upon your patience.

*Queen.* Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me. 105

*Hamlet.* No, good mother; here's metal more attractive.

[*Lying down at Ophelia's feet.*]

*Polonius.* [*To the King*] O, ho! do you mark that?

*Hamlet.* Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

*Ophelia.* No, my lord. 110

*Hamlet.* I mean, my head upon your lap?

*Ophelia.* Ay, my lord...You are merry, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Who, I?

*Ophelia.* Ay, my lord.

*Hamlet.* O God, your only jig-maker. What should a man do but be merry? for, look you, how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within these two hours.

*Ophelia.* Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord. 119

*Hamlet.* So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of sables. O heavens! die two months ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year: but, by'r lady, he must build churches, then; or else shall he suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is, "For, O, for, O, the hobby-horse is forgot." 126

*Hautboys play. The dumb-show enters.*

*Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly; the Queen embracing him, and he her. She kneels, and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck: lays him down upon a bank of flowers: she, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the King's ears, and exit. The Queen returns; finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. The Poisoner, with some two or three Mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner wooes the Queen with gifts: she seems loth and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love.*

*He is a mischief*  
[Exeunt.

*Ophelia.* What means this, my lord?

*Hamlet.* Marry, this is miching mallecho; it means mischief.

*Ophelia.* Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

131

*Enter Prologue.*

*Hamlet.* We shall know by this fellow: the players cannot keep counsel; they'll tell all.

*Ophelia.* Will he tell us what this show meant?

*Hamlet.* Ay, or any show that you'll show him.

*Ophelia.* You are naught, you are naught: I'll mark the play.

135

*Pro.* For us, and for our tragedy,  
Here stooping to your clemency,  
We beg your hearing patiently.

139

*Hamlet.* Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?

[Exit.



*Ophelia.* 'Tis brief, my lord.

*Hamlet.* As woman's love.

*Enter a King and a Queen.*

*P. King.* Full thirty times hath Phœbus' cart gone  
round

Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orb'd ground, 145  
And thirty dozen moons with borrow'd sheen  
About the world have times twelve thirties been,  
Since love our hearts, and Hymen did our hands,  
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

*P. Queen.* So many journeys may the sun and  
moon 150

Make us again count o'er ere love be done!  
But, woe is me, you are so sick of late,  
So far from cheer and from your former state,  
That I distrust you. Yet, though I distrust,  
Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must: 155  
For women's fear and love holds quantity;  
In neither aught, or in extremity.

Now, what my love is, proof hath made you know;  
And as my love is sized, my fear is so:

Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear; 160  
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there. *825*

*P. King.* Faith, I must leave thee, love, and  
shortly too;

My operant powers their functions leave to do:  
And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,  
Honour'd, beloved; and haply one as kind 165  
For husband shalt thou—

*P. Queen.* O, confound the rest!  
Such love must needs be treason in my breast:

In second husband let me be accurst !

None wed the second but who kill'd the first.

*Hamlet.* [*Aside*] Wormwood, wormwood. 170

*P. Queen.* The instances that second marriage move  
Are base respects of thrift, but none of love :

A second time I kill my husband dead  
When second husband kisses me in bed.

*P. King.* I do believe you think what now you  
speak ; 175

But what we do determine oft we break.

Purpose is but the slave to memory,

Of violent birth, but poor validity :

Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree ;

But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be. 180

Most necessary 'tis that we forget

To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt :

What to ourselves in passion we propose,

The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.

The violence of either grief or joy 185

Their own enactures with themselves destroy :

Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament ;

Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.

This world is not for aye ; nor 'tis not strange

That even our loves should with our fortunes change ;

For 'tis a question left us yet to prove, 191

Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.

The great man down, you mark his favourite flies ;

The poor advanced makes friends of enemies.

And hitherto doth love on fortune tend : 195

For who not needs shall never lack a friend ;

And who in want a hollow friend doth try,

Directly seasons him his enemy.

But, orderly to end where I begun,



Our wills and fates do so contrary run, 200  
 That our devices still are overthrown;  
 Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own:  
 So think thou wilt no second husband wed;  
 But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

*P. Queen.* Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven  
 light! 205

Sport and repose lock from me day and night!  
 To desperation turn my trust and hope!  
 An anchor's cheer in prison be my scope!  
 Each opposite that blanks the face of joy,  
 Meet what I would have well, and it destroy! 210  
 Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife,  
 If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

*Hamlet.* If she should break it now!

*P. King.* 'Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here  
 awhile;

My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile 215  
 The tedious day with sleep. [*Sleeps*]

*P. Queen.* Sleep rock thy brain;

And never come mischance between us twain! [*Exit.*]

*Hamlet.* Madam, how like you this play?

*Queen.* 'The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

*Hamlet.* O, but she'll keep her word. 220

*King.* Have you heard the argument? Is there no  
 offence in't?

*Hamlet.* No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest; no  
 offence i' the world.

*King.* What do you call the play? 225

*Hamlet.* The Mouse-trap. Marry, how? Tropically.  
 This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna:  
 Gonzago is the duke's name; his wife, Baptista: you  
 shall see anon; 'tis a knavish piece of work: but what

o' that? your majesty and we that have free souls, it touches us not: let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung.

232

*Enter* LUCIANUS.

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

*Ophelia.* You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

*Hamlet.* I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying.

236

*Ophelia.* You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

*Hamlet.* Begin, murderer; leave thy damnable faces, and begin. Come: "the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge."

240

*Lucianus.* Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit,  
and time agreeing;  
Confederate season, else no creature seeing;  
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,  
With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,  
Thy natural magic and dire property,  
On wholesome life usurp immediately.

245

*[Pours the poison into the sleeper's ears.]*

*Hamlet.* He poisons him i' the garden for's estate.  
His name's Gonzago: the story is extant, and writ in  
choice Italian: you shall see anon how the murderer gets  
the love of Gonzago's wife.

250

*Ophelia.* The king rises.

*Hamlet.* What, frightened with false fire!

*Queen.* How fares my lord?

*Polonius.* Give o'er the play.

*King.* Give me some light: away!

255

*All.* Lights, lights, lights!

*[Exeunt all except Hamlet and Horatio.]*



*Ham.* Why, let the stricken deer go weep,

The hart ungalled play;

For some must watch, while some must sleep:

So runs the world away. 260

Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers,—if the rest  
of my fortunes turn Turk with me,—with two Provincial  
roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of  
players, sir?

*Horatio.* Half a share. 265

*Hamlet.* A whole one, I.

For thou dost know, O Damon dear,

This realm dismantled was

Of Jove himself; and now reigns here

A very, very—pajock. 270

*Horatio.* You might have rhymed.

*Hamlet.* O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word  
for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?

*Horatio.* Very well, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Upon the talk of the poisoning? 275

*Horatio.* I did very well note him.

*Hamlet.* Ah, ha! Come, some music! come, the  
recorders!

For if the king like not the comedy,

Why, then, belike—he likes it not, perdy. 280

Come, some music!

*Re-enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.*

*Guil.* Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

*Hamlet.* Sir, a whole history.

*Guildenstern.* The king, sir,—

*Hamlet.* Ay, sir, what of him? 285

*Guil.* Is, in his retirement, marvellous distempered.

*Hamlet.* With drink, sir?

*Guildestern.* No, my lord, with choler.

*Hamlet.* Your wisdom should show itself more richer to signify this to his doctor; for, for me to put him to his purgation would perhaps plunge him into more choler. 291

*Guildestern.* Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame, and start not so wildly from my affair.

*Hamlet.* I am tame, sir: pronounce.

*Guildestern.* The queen, your mother, in most great affliction of spirit, hath sent me to you. 296

*Hamlet.* You are welcome.

*Guildestern.* Nay, good my lord, this courtesy is not of the right breed. If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer, I will do your mother's commandment: if not, your pardon and my return shall be the end of my business. 302

*Hamlet.* Sir, I cannot.

*Guildestern.* What, my lord?

*Hamlet.* Make you a wholesome answer; my wit's diseased: but, sir, such answer as I can make, you shall command; or, rather, as you say, my mother: therefore no more, but to the matter: my mother, you say,—

*Rosencrantz.* Then thus she says; your behaviour hath struck her into amazement and admiration. 310

*Hamlet.* O wonderful son, that can so astonish a mother! But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother's admiration? impart.

*Rosencrantz.* She desires to speak with you in her closet, ere you go to bed. 315

*Hamlet.* We shall obey, were she ten times our mother. Have you any further trade with us?

*Rosencrantz.* My lord, you once did love me.

*Hamlet.* And do still, by these pickers and stealers. 319

*Rosencrantz.* Good my lord, what is your cause of



distemper? you do, surely, bar the door upon your own liberty, if you deny your griefs to your friend.

*Hamlet.* Sir, I lack advancement.

*Rosencrantz.* How can that be, when you have the voice of the king himself for your succession in Denmark? 325

*Hamlet.* Ay, sir, but "While the grass grows,"—the proverb is something musty.

*Re-enter Players with recorders.*

O, the recorders: let me see one. To withdraw with you:—why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil? *Hamlet* 330

*Guildenstern.* O, my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly.

*Hamlet.* I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?

*Guildenstern.* My lord, I cannot. 335

*Hamlet.* I pray you.

*Guildenstern.* Believe me, I cannot.

*Hamlet.* I do beseech you.

*Guildenstern.* I know no touch of it, my lord. 339

*Hamlet.* 'Tis as easy as lying: govern these ventages with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.

*Guildenstern.* But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony; I have not the skill. 345

*Hamlet.* Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass: and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet cannot you make

it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

*Enter* POLONIUS.

God bless you, sir!

355

*Polonius.* My lord, the queen would speak with you, and presently.

*Hamlet.* Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?

*Polonius.* By the mass, and 'tis like a camel, indeed. 360

*Hamlet.* Methinks it is like a weasel.

*Polonius.* It is backed like a weasel.

*Hamlet.* Or like a whale?

*Polonius.* Very like a whale.

364

*Hamlet.* Then will I come to my mother by and by. ~~They fool me to the top of my bent.~~ I will come by and by.

*Polonius.* I will say so.

*Hamlet.* By and by is easily said. [*Exit Polonius*]  
Leave me, friends. [*Exeunt all but Hamlet.*]

371

'Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out  
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,  
And do such bitter business as the day

Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother. 375

O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever

The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:

Let me be cruel, not unnatural:

I will speak daggers to her, but use none;

My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites;

380

How in my words soever she be shent,

To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

[*Exit.*]



SCENE III. *A room in the same.*

*Enter King, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN.*

*King.* I like him not, nor stands it safe with us  
To let his madness range. Therefore prepare you;  
I your commission will forthwith dispatch,  
And he to England shall along with you:  
The terms of our estate may not endure  
Hazard so dangerous as doth hourly grow  
Out of his lunacies.

*Guildestern.* We will ourselves provide:  
Most holy and religious fear it is  
To keep those many many bodies safe  
That live and feed upon your majesty.

*Rosencrantz.* The single and peculiar life is bound,  
With all the strength and armour of the mind,  
To keep itself from noyance; but much more  
That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests  
The lives of many. The cease of majesty  
Dies not alone; but, like a gulf, doth draw  
What's near it with it; 'tis a massy wheel,  
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,  
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things  
Are mortised and adjoin'd; which, when it falls,  
Each small annexment, petty consequence,  
Attends the boisterous ruin. Ne'er alone  
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

*King.* Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage;  
For we will fetters put upon this fear,  
Which now goes too free-footed.

*Rosencrantz, Guildestern.* We will haste us.

[*Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildestern.*]

*Enter* POLONIUS.

*Polonius.* My lord, he's going to his mother's closet:  
Behind the arras I'll convey myself,  
To hear the process; I'll warrant she'll tax him home:  
And, as you said, and wisely was it said,  
'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,  
Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear  
The speech, of vantage. Fare you well, my liege:  
I'll call upon you ere you go to bed,  
And tell you what I know.

*King.*

Thanks, dear my lord.

[*Exit Polonius.*]

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;  
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,  
A brother's murder! Pray can I not,  
Though inclination be as sharp as will:  
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;  
And, like a man to double business bound,  
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,  
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand  
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,  
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy  
But to confront the visage of offence?  
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,  
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;  
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer  
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"?  
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd  
Of those effects for which I did the murder,  
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.



May one be pardon'd, and retain the offence?  
In the corrupted currents of this world  
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,  
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself  
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above; 60  
There is no shuffling, there the action lies  
In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,  
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,  
To give in evidence. What then? what rests?  
Try what repentance can: what can it not? 65  
Yet what can it when one can not repent?  
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!  
O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,  
Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay:  
Bow, stubborn knees; and, heart with strings of steel, 70  
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!  
All may be well. [*Retires and kneels.*

*Enter HAMLET.*

*Hamlet.* Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;  
And now I'll do't: and so he goes to heaven;  
And so am I revenged: that would be scann'd: 75  
A villain kills my father; and for that,  
I, his sole son, do this same villain send  
To heaven.  
O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.  
He took my father grossly, full of bread;  
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;  
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?  
But, in our circumstance and course of thought,  
'Tis heavy with him: and am I then revenged,  
To take him in the purging of his soul, 85

When he is fit and season'd for his passage?  
No.

Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:  
When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage;  
At gaming, swearing, or about some act  
That has no relish of salvation in't;  
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,  
And that his soul may be as damn'd and black  
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays:  
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

90

94

[Exit.

[The King rises and advances.

King. My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;  
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

[Exit.

SCENE IV. *Another room in the same.*

*Enter Queen and POLONIUS.*

Pol. He will come straight. Look you lay home to him:  
Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,  
And that your grace hath screen'd and stood between  
Much heat and him. I'll sconce me even here.  
Pray you, be round with him.

5

[Ham. [Within] Mother, mother, mother!

Queen.

I'll warrant you;

Fear me not: withdraw, I hear him coming.

[Polonius goes behind the arras.

*Enter HAMLET.*

Hamlet. Now, mother, what's the matter?

Queen. Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

Hamlet. Mother, you have my father much offended.

10



*Queen.* Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

*Hamlet.* Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

*Queen.* Why, how now, Hamlet!

*Hamlet.* What's the matter now?

*Queen.* Have you forgot me?

*Hamlet.* No, by the rood, not so:  
You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife; 15  
And—would it were not so!—you are my mother.

*Queen.* Nay, then, I'll set those to you that can speak.

*Hamlet.* Come, come, and sit you down; you shall  
not budge;

You go not till I set you up a glass  
Where you may see the inmost part of you. 20

*Queen.* What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me?  
Help, help, ho!

*Pol.* [*Behind*] What, ho! help, help, help!

*Hamlet.* [*Drawing*] How now! a rat? Dead for a  
ducat, dead! [*Makes a pass through the arras.*

*Polonius.* [*Behind*] O, I am slain! [*Falls and dies.*

*Queen.* O, me, what hast thou done?

*Hamlet.* Nay, I know not: 25

Is it the king?

*Queen.* O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

*Hamlet.* A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother,  
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.

*Queen.* As kill a king!

*Hamlet.* Ay, lady, 'twas my word. 30

[*Lifts up the arras, and sees Polonius.*

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!

I took thee for thy better: take thy fortune;

Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.

Leave wringing of your hands: peace; sit you down,

And let me wring your heart: for so I shall, 35

If it be made of penetrable stuff;  
If damned custom have not brass'd it so,  
That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

*Queen.* What have I done, that thou darest wag thy  
tongue  
In noise so rude against me?

*Hamlet.* Such an act 40  
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,  
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose  
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,  
And sets a blister there, makes marriage-vows  
As false as dicers' oaths: O, such a deed 45  
As from the body of contraction plucks  
The very soul, and sweet religion makes  
A rhapsody of words: heaven's face doth glow;  
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,  
With tristful visage, as against the doom, 50  
Is thought-sick at the act.

*Queen.* Ay me, what act,  
That roars so loud and thunders in the index?

*Hamlet.* Look here, upon this picture, and on this,  
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers. 55  
See, what a grace was seated on this brow;  
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;  
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;  
A station like the herald Mercury  
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;  
A combination and a form indeed, 60  
Where every god did seem to set his seal,  
To give the world assurance of a man:  
This was your husband. Look you now, what follows:  
Here is your husband; like a mildew'd ear,  
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes? 65



Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,  
 And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?  
 You cannot call it love; for at your age  
 The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble,  
 And waits upon the judgment: and what judgment 70  
 Would step from this to this? Sense, sure, you have,  
 Else could you not have motion: but, sure, that sense  
 Is apoplex'd: for madness would not err,  
 Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd  
 But it reserv'd some quantity of choice, 75  
 To serve in such a difference. What devil was't  
 That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?  
 Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,  
 Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,  
 Or but a sickly part of one true sense 80  
 Could not so mope.

O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,  
 If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,  
 To flaming youth let virtue be as wax,  
 And melt in her own fire: proclaim no shame 85  
 When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,  
 Since frost itself as actively doth burn,  
 And reason panders will.

*Queen.* O Hamlet, speak no more:  
 Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;  
 And there I see such black and grained spots 90  
 As will not leave their tinct.

*Hamlet.* Nay, but to live  
 Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love  
 Over the nasty sty,—

*Queen.* O, speak to me no more;  
 These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;  
 No more, sweet Hamlet!

*Hamlet.* A murderer and a villain ; 95  
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe  
Of your precedent lord ; a vice of kings ;  
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,  
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,  
And put it in his pocket !

*Queen.* No more ! 100

*Hamlet.* A king of shreds and patches,—

*Enter Ghost.*

Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings,  
You heavenly guards ! What would your gracious figure ?

*Queen.* Alas, he's mad !

*Hamlet.* Do you not come your tardy son to chide, 105  
That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by  
The important acting of your dread command ?  
O, say !

*Ghost.* Do not forget : this visitation  
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose. 110  
But, look, amazement on thy mother sits :  
O, step between her and her fighting soul ;  
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works :  
Speak to her, Hamlet.

*Hamlet.* How is it with you, lady ?

*Queen.* Alas, how is't with you, 115  
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,  
And with the incorporal air do hold discourse ?  
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep ;  
And, as the sleeping soldiers in the alarm,  
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements, 120  
Start up, and stand an end. O gentle son,  
Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper  
Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you look ?



*Ham.* On him, on him ! Look you, how pale he glares !  
His form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to stones, 125  
Would make them capable. Do not look upon me ;  
Lest with this piteous action you convert  
My stern effects : then what I have to do  
Will want true colour ; tears perchance for blood.

*Queen.* To whom do you speak this ?

*Hamlet.* Do you see nothing there ? 130

*Queen.* Nothing at all ; yet all that is I see.

*Ham.* Nor did you nothing hear ?

*Queen.* No, nothing but ourselves.

*Hamlet.* Why, look you there ! look, how it steals away !  
My father, in his habit as he lived !

Look, where he goes, even now, out at the portal ! 135  
[*Exit Ghost.*

*Queen.* This is the very coinage of your brain :  
This bodiless creation ecstasy  
Is very cunning in.

*Hamlet.* Ecstasy !

My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time,  
And makes as healthful music : 'tis not madness 140

That I have utter'd : bring me to the test,  
And I the matter will re-word ; which madness

Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace

Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,

That not your trespass, but my madness speaks : 145

It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,

Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,

Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven ;

Repent what's past ; avoid what is to come ;

And do not spread the compost on the weeds, 150

To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue ;

For in the fatness of these pursy times

Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,  
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.

*Queen.* O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain. 155

*Hamlet.* O, throw away the worser part of it,  
And live the purer with the other half.  
Good night: but go not to my uncle's bed;  
Assume a virtue, if you have it not.

That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,  
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this, 160

That to the use of actions fair and good  
He likewise gives a frock or livery,

That aptly is put on. Refrain to-night;

And that shall lend a kind of easiness 165

To the next abstinence: the next more easy;

For use almost can change the stamp of nature,

And either master the devil, or throw him out

With wondrous potency. Once more, good night:

And when you are desirous to be bless'd, 170

I'll blessing beg of you.—For this same lord,

[*Pointing to Polonius.*

I do repent: but heaven hath pleased it so,

To punish me with this, and this with me,

That I must be their scourge and minister.

I will bestow him, and will answer well 175

The death I gave him. So, again, good night.

I must be cruel, only to be kind:

Thus bad begins, and worse remains behind.

One word more, good lady.

*Queen.*

What shall I do?

*Hamlet.* Not this, by no means, that I bid you do: 180

Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed;

Pinch wanton on your cheek; call you his mouse;

And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,

Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,



Make you to ravel all this matter out, 185  
 That I essentially am not in madness,  
 But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know;  
 For who, that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,  
 Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,  
 Such dear concernings hide? who would do so? 190  
 No, in despite of sense and secrecy,  
 Unpeg the basket on the house's top,  
 Let the birds fly, and, like the famous ape,  
 To try conclusions, in the basket creep,  
 And break your own neck down. 195

*Queen.* Be thou assured, if words be made of breath,  
 And breath of life, I have no life to breathe  
 What thou hast said to me.

*Hamlet.* I must to England; you know that?

*Queen.* Alack, 200  
 I had forgot: 'tis so concluded on.

*Ham.* There's letters seal'd: and my two schoolfellows,  
 Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd,  
 They bear the mandate; they must sweep my way,  
 And marshal me to knavery. Let it work;  
 For 'tis the sport to have the enginer 205  
 Hoist with his own petar: and't shall go hard  
 But I will delve one yard below their mines,  
 And blow them at the moon: O, 'tis most sweet  
 When in one line two crafts directly meet.

This man shall set me packing: 210  
 I'll lug the corpse into the neighbour room.  
 Mother, good night. Indeed, this counsellor  
 Is now most still, most secret, and most grave,  
 Who was in life a foolish prating knave.

Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you. 215  
 Good night, mother.

[*Exeunt severally; Hamlet dragging in Polonius.*]

## ACT IV.

SCENE I. *A room in the castle.*

*Enter* King, Queen, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN.

*King.* There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves :

You must translate : 'tis fit we understand them.  
Where is your son ?

*Queen.* Bestow this place on us a little while.

*[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]*

Ah, mine own lord, what have I seen to-night !

*King.* What, Gertrude ? How does Hamlet ?

*Queen.* Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend  
Which is the mightier : in his lawless fit,  
Behind the arras hearing something stir,  
Whips out his rapier, cries "A rat, a rat !" 10  
And, in this brainish apprehension, kills  
The unseen good old man.

*King.* O heavy deed !  
It had been so with us, had we been there :  
His liberty is full of threats to all ;  
To you yourself, to us, to every one. 15

Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answer'd ?  
It will be laid to us, whose providence  
Should have kept short, restrain'd, and out of haunt  
This mad young man : but so much was our love,  
We would not understand what was most fit ; 20  
But, like the owner of a foul disease,



To keep it from divulging, let it feed  
Even on the pith of life. Where is he gone?

*Queen.* To draw apart the body he hath kill'd:  
O'er whom his very madness, like some ore 25  
Among a mineral of metals base,  
Shows itself pure; he weeps for what is done.

*King.* O Gertrude, come away!  
The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch,  
But we will ship him hence: and this vile deed 30  
We must, with all our majesty and skill,  
Both countenance and excuse. Ho, Guildenstern!

*Re-enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.*

Friends both, go join you with some further aid:  
Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain,  
And from his mother's closet hath he dragg'd him: 35  
Go seek him out; speak fair, and bring the body  
Into the chapel. I pray you, haste in this.

*[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.]*

Come, Gertrude, we'll call up our wisest friends;  
And let them know, both what we mean to do,  
And what's untimely done: [so, haply slander—] 40  
Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter,  
As level as the cannon to his blank,  
Transports his poison'd shot—may miss our name,  
And hit the woundless air. O, come away!  
My soul is full of discord and dismay. *[Exeunt.]* 45

SCENE II. *Another room in the castle.**Enter HAMLET.**Hamlet.* Safely stowed.*Ros., Guil. [Within]* Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!*Hamlet.* What noise? who calls on Hamlet? O, here they come.*Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.**Ros.* What have you done, my lord, with the dead body?*Ham.* Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin. 6*Ros.* Tell us where 'tis; that we may take it thence,  
And bear it to the chapel.*Hamlet.* Do not believe it.*Rosencrantz.* Believe what? 10*Hamlet.* That I can keep your counsel, and not mine own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge! what replication should be made by the son of a king?*Rosencrantz.* Take you me for a sponge, my lord? 14*Hamlet.* Ay, sir; that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the king best service in the end: he keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to be last swallowed: when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again. 20*Rosencrantz.* I understand you not, my lord.*Hamlet.* I am glad of it: a knaveish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.*Rosencrantz.* My lord, you must tell us where the body is, and go with us to the king. 25



*Hamlet.* The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body. The king is a thing—

*Guildestern.* A thing, my lord!

*Hamlet.* Of nothing: bring me to him. *Hide fox, and*  
all after. *[Exeunt. 30*

SCENE III. *Another room in the castle.*

*Enter King, attended.*

*King.* I have sent to seek him, and to find the body.  
How dangerous is it that this man goes loose:

Yet must not we put the strong law on him:

✓ He's loved of the distracted multitude,

Who like not in their judgment, but their eyes; 5

And where 'tis so, the offender's scourge is weigh'd,

But never the offence. To bear all smooth and even,

This sudden sending him away must seem

Deliberate pause: diseases desperate grown

By desperate appliance are relieved, 10

Or not at all.

*Enter ROSENCRANTZ.*

How now! what hath befall'n?

*Rosencrantz.* Where the dead body is bestow'd, my lord,  
We cannot get from him.

*King.* But where is he?

*Ros.* Without, my lord; guarded, to know your pleasure.

*King.* Bring him before us. 15

*Rosencrantz.* Ho, Guildenstern! bring in my lord.

*Enter HAMLET and GUILDENSTERN.*

*King.* Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

*Hamlet.* At supper.

*King.* At supper! where?

19

*Hamlet.* Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots: your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service,—two dishes, but to one table: that's the end.

25

*King.* Alas, alas!

*Hamlet.* A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

*King.* What dost thou mean by this?

*Hamlet.* Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through a beggar.

31

*King.* Where is Polonius?

*Ham.* In heaven; send thither to see: if your messenger find him not there, seek him i' the other place yourself. But indeed, if you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

36

*King.* Go seek him there. [*To some Attendants.*

*Ham.* He will stay till ye come. [*Exeunt Attendants.*

*King.* Hamlet, this deed, for thine especial safety,—Which we do tender, as we dearly grieve

40

For that which thou hast done,—must send thee hence

With fiery quickness: therefore prepare thyself;

The bark is ready, and the wind at help,

The associates tend, and every thing is bent

For England.

*Hamlet.* For England!

*King.*

Ay, Hamlet.

*Hamlet.*

Good.

45



*King.* So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes.

*Hamlet.* I see a cherub that sees them. But, come; for England! Farewell, dear mother.

*King.* Thy loving father, Hamlet. 49

*Hamlet.* My mother: father and mother is man and wife; man and wife is one flesh; and so, my mother. Come, for England! [Exit.

*King.* Follow him at foot; tempt him with speed aboard; Delay it not; I'll have him hence to-night: Away! for every thing is seal'd and done 55 That else leans on the affair: pray you, make haste.

[*Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.*

And, England, if my love thou hold'st at aught,—  
As my great power thereof may give thee sense,  
Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red  
After the Danish sword, and thy free awe 60  
Pays homage to us,—thou mayst not coldly set  
Our sovereign process; which imports at full,  
By letters congruing to that effect,  
The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England;  
For like the hectic in my blood he rages, 65  
And thou must cure me: till I know 'tis done,  
Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun. [Exit.

#### SCENE IV. *A plain in Denmark.*

*Enter FORTINBRAS, a Captain, and Forces, marching.*

*Fortinbras.* Go, captain, from me greet the Danish king;  
Tell him that, by his license, Fortinbras  
Claims the conveyance of a promised march  
Over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous.  
If that his majesty would aught with us, 5

We shall express our duty in his eye;  
And let him know so.

*Captain.* I will do't, my lord.

*For.* Go softly on. [*Exeunt Fortinbras and Forces.*]

*Enter HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others.*

*Hamlet.* Good sir, whose powers are these?

*Captain.* They are of Norway, sir.

10

*Hamlet.* How purposed, sir, I pray you?

*Captain.* Against some part of Poland.

*Hamlet.* Who commands them, sir?

*Captain.* The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

*Hamlet.* Goes it against the main of Poland, sir,  
Or for some frontier? 15

*Captain.* Truly to speak, sir, and with no addition,  
We go to gain a little patch of ground  
That hath in it no profit but the name.  
To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it;  
Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole  
A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee. 20

*Hamlet.* Why, then, the Polack never will defend it.

*Captain.* Yes, 'tis already garrison'd.

*Ham.* Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats  
Will not debate the question of this straw: 26

This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace,  
That inward breaks, and shows no cause without  
Why the man dies. I humbly thank you, sir.

*Cap.* God be wi' you, sir. [*Exit.*]

*Rosencrantz.* Will't please you go, my lord?

*Ham.* I'll be with you straight. Go a little before. 31

[*Exeunt all except Hamlet.*]

How all occasions do inform against me,  
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,



If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more. 35  
Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and godlike reason  
To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be  
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple 40  
Of thinking too precisely on the event,—  
A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom  
And ever three parts coward,—I do not know  
Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do;"  
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means 45  
To do't. Examples, gross as earth, exhort me:  
Witness this army, of such mass and charge,  
Led by a delicate and tender prince,  
Whose spirit, with divine ambition puff'd,  
Makes mouths at the invisible event, 50  
Exposing what is mortal and unsure  
To all that fortune, death and danger dare,  
Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great  
Is not to stir without great argument,  
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw 55  
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,  
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,  
Excitements of my reason and my blood,  
And let all sleep? while, to my shame, I see  
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,  
That for a fantasy and trick of fame 60  
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,  
Which is not tomb enough and continent  
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,  
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! 65

[Exit.

SCENE V. *Elsinore. A room in the castle.*

*Enter Queen, HORATIO, and a Gentleman.*

*Queen.* I will not speak with her.

*Gentleman.* She is importunate, indeed distract;  
Her mood will needs be pitied.

*Queen.* What would she have?

*Gent.* She speaks much of her father; says she hears  
There's tricks i' the world; and hems, and beats her heart;  
Spurns enviously at straws; speaks things in doubt, 6  
That carry but half sense: her speech is nothing,  
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move  
The hearers to collection; they aim at it,  
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts; 10  
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,  
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,  
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.

*Horatio.* 'Twere good she were spoken with; for she  
may strew  
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds. 15

*Queen.* Let her come in. [*Exit Horatio.*]  
To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,  
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss:  
So full of artless jealousy is guilt,  
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt. 20

*Re-enter HORATIO, with OPHELIA.*

*Ophelia.* Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?

*Queen.* How now, Ophelia!

*Ophelia.* [*Sings*] How should I your true love know  
From another one?



By his cockle hat and staff, 25  
And his sandal shoon.

*Queen.* Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

*Ophelia.* Say you? nay, pray you, mark.

[*Sings*] He is dead and gone, lady,  
He is dead and gone; 30  
At his head a grass-green turf,  
At his heels a stone.

*Queen.* Nay, but, Ophelia,—

*Ophelia.* Pray you, mark.

[*Sings*] White his shroud as the mountain snow,— 35

*Enter King.*

*Queen.* Alas, look here, my lord.

*Oph.* [*Sings*] Larded with sweet flowers;  
Which bewept to the grave did go  
With true-love showers.

*King.* How do you, pretty lady? 40

*Ophelia.* Well, God 'ild you! They say the owl was a  
baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know  
not what we may be. God be at your table!

*King.* Conceit upon her father.

*Ophelia.* Pray you, let's have no words of this; but when  
they ask you what it means, say you this: 46

[*Sings*] To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,  
All in the morning betime,  
And I a maid at your window,  
To be your Valentine. 50

*King.* Pretty Ophelia! How long hath she been thus?

*Ophelia.* I hope all will be well. We must be patient:  
but I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him  
i' the cold ground. My brother shall know of it: and so I

thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night.

[*Exit.* 57

*King.* Follow her close; give her good watch, I pray you.

[*Exit Horatio.*

O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs  
All from her father's death. O Gertrude, Gertrude, 60

When sorrows come, they come not single spies,

~~But in battalions!~~ First, her father slain:

Next, your son gone; and he most violent author

Of his own just remove: the people muddied, 64

Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers,

For good Polonius' death; and we have done but greenly,

In hugger-mugger to inter him: poor Ophelia

Divided from herself and her fair judgment,

Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts:

Last, and as much containing as all these, 70

Her brother is in secret come from France;

Feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds,

And wants not buzzers to infect his ear

With pestilent speeches of his father's death;

Wherein necessity, of matter beggar'd, 75

Will nothing stick our person to arraign

In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,

Like to a murdering-piece, in many places

Gives me superfluous death. [*A noise within.*

*Queen.*

Alack, what noise is this?

*King.* Where are my Switzers? Let them guard the  
door.

80

*Enter a Gentleman.*

What is the matter?

*Gentleman.*

Save yourself, my lord:



The ocean, overpeering of his list,  
Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste  
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,  
O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord; 85  
And, as the world were now but to begin,  
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,  
The ratifiers and props of every word,  
They cry, "Choose we; Laertes shall be king!"  
Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds, 90  
"Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!"

*Queen.* How cheerfully on the false trail they cry!  
O, this is counter, you false Danish dogs!

*King.* The doors are broke. [Noise within. 94

*Enter LAERTES, armed; Danes following.*

*Laertes.* Where is this king? Sirs, stand you all without.

*Danes.* No, let's come in.

*Laertes.* I pray you, give me leave.

*Danes.* We will, we will. [*They retire without the door.*

*Laertes.* I thank you: keep the door. O thou vile king,  
Give me my father!

*Queen.* Calmly, good Laertes.

*Laertes.* That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me  
bastard; 100

Cries cuckold to my father; brands the harlot  
Even here, between the chaste unsmirched brow  
Of my true mother.

*King.* What's the cause, Laertes,  
That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?  
Let him go, Gertrude; do not fear our person: 105  
There's such divinity doth hedge a king,  
That treason can but peep to what it would,

Acts little of his will. Tell me, Laertes,  
Why thou art thus incensed: let him go, Gertrude:  
Speak, man.

110

*Laertes.* Where is my father?

*King.*

Dead.

*Queen.*

But not by him.

*King.* Let him demand his fill.

*Laertes.* How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with:  
To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil!

Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!

115

I dare damnation: to this point I stand,

That both the worlds I give to negligence,

Let come what comes; only I'll be revenged

Most thoroughly for my father.

*King.*

Who shall stay you?

*Laertes.* My will, not all the world:

120

And for my means, I'll husband them so well,

They shall go far with little.

*King.*

Good Laertes,

If you desire to know the certainty

Of your dear father's death, is't writ in your revenge

That, swoopstake, you will draw both friend and foe,

Winner and loser?

126

*Laertes.* None but his enemies.

*King.*

Will you know them then?

*Laertes.* To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms,

And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,

Repast them with my blood.

*King.*

Why, now you speak

130

Like a good child and a true gentleman.

That I am guiltless of your father's death,

And am most sensibly in grief for it,

It shall as level to your judgment pierce



As day does to your eye.

*Danes.* [*Within*] Let her come in. 135

*Laertes.* How now! what noise is that?

*Re-enter OPHELIA.*

O heat, dry up my brains! tears seven-times salt,  
Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye!  
By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight,  
Till our scale turn the beam. O rose of May! 140

Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!  
O heavens! is't possible a young maid's wits  
Should be as mortal as an old man's life?  
Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine,  
It sends some precious instance of itself 145  
After the thing it loves.

*Oph.* [*Sings*] They bore him barefaced on the bier;  
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny;  
And in his grave rain'd many a tear,—

Fare you well, my dove! 150

*Laer.* Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,  
It could not move thus.

*Oph.* [*Sings*] You must sing a-down a-down,  
An you call him a-down-a.

O, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false steward,  
that stole his master's daughter. 156

*Laertes.* This nothing's more than matter.

*Ophelia.* There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray  
you, love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.

*Laertes.* A document in madness, thoughts and remem-  
brance fitted. 161

*Ophelia.* There's fennel for you, and columbines: there's  
rue for you; and here's some for me: we may call it herb  
of grace o' Sundays: O, you must wear your rue with a differ-

ence. There's a daisy: I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died: they say he made a good end,—

167

[Sings] For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy,—

*Laertes.* Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,  
She turns to favour and to prettiness.

170

*Ophelia.* [Sings]

And will he not come again?

And will he not come again?

No, no, he is dead:

Go to thy death-bed:

He never will come again.

175

His beard was as white as snow,

All flaxen was his poll:

He is gone, he is gone,

And we cast away moan:

God ha' mercy on his soul!

180

And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God be wi' ye.

[Exit.

*Laertes.* Do you see this, O God?

*King.* Laertes, I must commune with your grief,  
Or you deny me right. Go but apart,

Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will,  
And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me:

185

If by direct or by collateral hand

They find us touch'd, we will our kingdom give,

Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours,

To you in satisfaction; but if not,

190

Be you content to lend your patience to us,

And we shall jointly labour with your soul

To give it due content.

*Laertes.*

Let this be so;



His means of death, his obscure burial,—  
 No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones, 195  
 No noble rite nor formal ostentation,—  
 Cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth,  
 That I must call't in question.

*King.* So you shall;  
 And where the offence is let the great axe fall.  
 I pray you, go with me. [Exit. 200

SCENE VI. *Another room in the castle.*

*Enter HORATIO and a Servant.*

*Horatio.* What are they that would speak with me?

*Servant.* Sailors, sir: they say they have letters for you.

*Horatio.* Let them come in. [Exit Servant.

I do not know from what part of the world  
 I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet. 5

*Enter Sailors.*

*First Sailor.* God bless you, sir.

*Horatio.* Let him bless thee too.

*First Sailor.* He shall, sir, an't please him. There's a  
 letter for you, sir: it comes from the ambassador that was  
 bound for England; if your name be Horatio, as I am let  
 to know it is. 11

*Horatio.* [Reads] "Horatio, when thou shalt have over-  
 looked this, give these fellows some means to the king:  
 they have letters for him. Ere we were two days old at sea,  
 a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding  
 ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour,  
 and in the grapple I boarded them: on the instant they

got clear of our ship; so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy: but they knew what they did; I am to do a good turn for them. Let the king have the letters I have sent; and repair thou to me with as much haste as thou wouldst fly death. I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb; yet are they much too light for the bore of the matter. These good fellows will bring thee where I am. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England: of them I have much to tell thee. Farewell. 27

“He that thou knowest thine, HAMLET.”

Come, I will make you way for these your letters;  
And do't the speedier, that you may direct me 30  
To him from whom you brought them. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE VII. *Another room in the castle.*

*Enter King and LAERTES.*

*King.* Now must your conscience my acquittance seal,  
And you must put me in your heart for friend,  
Sith you have heard, and with a knowing ear,  
That he which hath your noble father slain  
Pursued my life.

*Laertes.* It well appears: but tell me 5  
Why you proceeded not against these feats,  
So crimeful and so capital in nature,  
As by your safety, wisdom, all things else,  
You mainly were stirr'd up.

*King.* O, for two special reasons;  
Which may to you, perhaps, seem much unsinew'd, 10  
But yet to me they are strong. The queen his mother



Lives almost by his looks; and for myself,—  
My virtue or my plague, be't either which,—  
She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,  
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere, 15  
I could not but by her. The other motive,  
Why to a public count I might not go,  
Is the great love the general gender bear him;  
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,  
Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone, 20  
Convert his gyves to graces; so that my arrows,  
Too slightly timber'd for so loud a wind,  
Would have reverted to my bow again,  
And not where I had aim'd them.

*Laertes.* And so have I a noble father lost; 25  
A sister driven into desperate terms,  
Whose worth, if praises may go back again,  
Stood challenger on mount of all the age  
For her perfections: but my revenge will come.

*King.* Break not your sleeps for that: you must not 30  
think  
That we are made of stuff so flat and dull,  
That we can let our beard be shook with danger  
And think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more:  
I loved your father, and we love ourself;  
And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine— 35

*Enter a Messenger.*

How now! what news?

*Messenger.* Letters, my lord, from Hamlet:  
This to your majesty; this to the queen.

*King.* From Hamlet! who brought them?

*Messenger.* Sailors, my lord, they say; I saw them not:

They were given me by Claudio; he received them 40  
Of him that brought them.

*King.* Laertes, you shall hear them.  
Leave us. *[Exit Messenger.]*

*[Reads]* "High and mighty, You shall know I am set  
naked on your kingdom. To-morrow shall I beg leave to  
see your kingly eyes: when I shall, first asking your pardon  
thereunto, recount the occasion of my sudden and more  
strange return. 47

"HAMLET."

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back?  
Or is it some abuse, and no such thing? 50

*Laer.* Know you the hand?

*King.* 'Tis Hamlet's character. "Naked,"—  
And in a postscript here, he says, "alone."  
Can you advise me?

*Laertes.* I am lost in it, my lord. But let him come;  
It warms the very sickness in my heart, 55  
That I shall live and tell him to his teeth,  
"Thus diddest thou."

*King.* If it be so, Laertes,—  
As how should it be so? how otherwise?—  
Will you be ruled by me?

*Laertes.* Ay, my lord;  
So you will not o'errule me to a peace. 60

*King.* To thine own peace. If he be now return'd,  
As checking at his voyage, and that he means  
No more to undertake it, I will work him  
To an exploit, now ripe in my device,  
Under the which he shall not choose but fall: 65  
And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,  
But even his mother shall uncharge the practice,  
And call it accident.



*Laertes.* My lord, I will be ruled;  
The rather, if you could devise it so,  
That I might be the organ.

*King.* It falls right. 70  
You have been talk'd of since your travel much,  
And that in Hamlet's hearing, for a quality  
Wherein, they say, you shine: your sum of parts  
Did not together pluck such envy from him,  
As did that one, and that, in my regard, 75  
Of the unworthiest siege.

*Laertes.* What part is that, my lord?

*King.* A very riband in the cap of youth,  
Yet needful too; for youth no less becomes  
The light and careless livery that it wears  
Than settled age his sables and his weeds, 80  
Importing health and graveness. Two months since,  
Here was a gentleman of Normandy,—  
I have seen myself, and serv'd against, the French,  
And they can well on horseback: but this gallant  
Had witchcraft in't; he grew unto his seat; 85  
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse,  
As he had been incorpsed and demi-natured  
With the brave beast: so far he topp'd my thought,  
That I, in forgery of shapes and tricks,  
Come short of what he did.

*Laertes.* A Norman was't? 90

*King.* A Norman.

*Laertes.* Upon my life, Lamond.

*King.* The very same.

*Laertes.* I know him well: he is the brooch indeed  
And gem of all the nation.

*King.* He made confession of you, 95  
And gave you such a masterly report,

For art and exercise in your defence,  
And for your rapier most especially,  
That he cried out, 'twould be a sight indeed,  
If one could match you: the scrimers of their nation, 100  
He swore, had neither motion, guard, nor eye,  
If you opposed them. Sir, this report of his  
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy,  
That he could nothing do but wish and beg  
Your sudden coming o'er, to play with him. 105  
Now, out of this,—

*Laertes.* What out of this, my lord?

*King.* Laertes, was your father dear to you?  
Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,  
A face without a heart?

*Laertes.* Why ask you this?

*King.* Not that I think you did not love your father;  
But that I know love is begun by time;  
And that I see, in passages of proof,  
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.  
There lives within the very flame of love  
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it; 115  
And nothing is at a like goodness still;  
For goodness, growing to a plurisy,  
Dies in his own too-much: that we would do,  
We should do when we would; for this “would” changes,  
And hath abatements and delays as many 120  
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents;  
And then this “should” is like a spendthrift sigh,  
That hurts by easing. But, to the quick o' the ulcer:—  
Hamlet comes back: what would you undertake,  
To show yourself your father's son in deed 125  
More than in words?

*Laertes.* To cut his throat i' the church.



*King.* No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize;  
Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,  
Will you do this, keep close within your chamber.  
Hamlet return'd shall know you are come home: 130  
We'll put on those shall praise your excellence,  
And set a double varnish on the fame  
The Frenchman gave you; bring you in fine together,  
And wager on your heads: he, ~~being remiss,~~  
Most generous, and free from all contriving, 135  
Will not peruse the foils; so that with ease,  
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose  
A sword unbated, and in a pass of practice  
Requite him for your father.

*Laertes.* I will do't:  
And for that purpose I'll anoint my sword. 140  
I bought an unction of a mountebank,  
So mortal, that but dip a knife in it,  
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,  
Collected from all simples that have virtue  
Under the moon, can save the thing from death 145  
That is but scratch'd withal: I'll touch my point  
With this contagion, that, if I gall him slightly,  
It may be death.

*King.* Let's further think of this:  
Weigh what convenience both of time and means  
May fit us to our shape: if this should fail, 150  
And that our drift look through our bad performance,  
'Twere better not assay'd: therefore this project  
Should have a back or second, that might hold,  
If this should blast in proof. Soft! let me see:  
We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings. 155  
I ha't:  
When in your motion you are hot and dry,—

As make your bouts more violent to that end,—  
 And that he calls for drink, I'll have prepared him  
 A chalice for the nonce; whereon but sipping,  
 If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,  
 Our purpose may hold there.

160

*Whisper*  
*pretty*

*Enter* Queen.

How now, sweet queen!

*Queen.* One woe doth tread upon another's heel,  
 So fast they follow: your sister's drown'd, Laertes.

*Laertes.* Drown'd! O, where?

165

*Queen.* There is a willow grows aslant a brook,  
 That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;  
 There with fantastic garlands did she come  
 Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples  
 That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,  
 But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them:  
 There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds  
 Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke:  
 When down her weedy trophies and herself  
 Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,  
 And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;  
 Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,  
 As one incapable of her own distress,  
 Or like a creature native and indued  
 Unto that element: but long it could not be  
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
 Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
 To muddy death.

170

175

180

*Laertes.* Alas, then, she is drown'd?

*Queen.* Drown'd, drown'd.

*Laertes.* Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,



And therefore I forbid my tears : but yet 186  
It is our trick ; nature her custom holds,  
Let shame say what it will : when these are gone,  
The woman will be out. Adieu, my lord :  
I have a speech of fire, that fain would blaze, 190  
But that this folly douts it. [*Exit.*]

*King.* Let's follow, Gertrude :  
How much I had to do to calm his rage !  
Now fear I this will give it start again ;  
Therefore let's follow. [*Exeunt.*]

slow and steady was the  
race

## ACT V.

SCENE I. *Elsinore. A churchyard.**Enter two Clowns, with spades, &c.*

*First Clown.* Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?

*Second Clown.* I tell thee she is; and therefore make her grave straight: the crowner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial. 5

*First Clown.* How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defence?

*Second Clown.* Why, 'tis found so.

*First Clown.* It must be *se offendendo*; it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act: and an act hath three branches; it is, to act, to do, to perform: argal, she drowned herself wittingly. 12

*Second Clown.* Nay, but hear you, goodman delver,—

*First Clown.* Give me leave. Here lies the water; good: here stands the man; good: if the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes,—mark you that; but if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself: argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

*Second Clown.* But is this law? 20

*First Clown.* Ay, marry, is't; crowner's quest law.

*Second Clown.* Will you ha' the truth on't? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out of Christian burial. 24

*First Clown.* Why, there thou say'st: and the more pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to



drown or hang themselves, more than their even Christian. Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers: they hold up Adam's profession. 30

*Second Clown.* Was he a gentleman?

*First Clown.* He was the first that ever bore arms.

*Second Clown.* Why, he had none.

*First Clown.* What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says, Adam digged: could he dig without arms? I'll put another question to thee: if thou answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself—

*Second Clown.* Go to. 39

*First Clown.* What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

*Second Clown.* The gallows-maker; for that frame outlives a thousand tenants. 43

*First Clown.* I like thy wit well, in good faith: the gallows does well; but how does it well? it does well to those that do ill: now, thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church: argal, the gallows may do well to thee. To't again, come.

*Second Clown.* "Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?" 50

*First Clown.* Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

*Second Clown.* Marry, now I can tell.

*First Clown.* To't.

*Second Clown.* Mass, I cannot tell. 54

*Enter HAMLET and HORATIO, at some distance.*

*First Clown.* Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating; and when you are asked this question next, say "a grave-maker:" the

houses that he makes last till doomsday. Go, get thee to Yaughan; fetch me a stoup of liquor. [*Exit Second Clown.*  
[*He digs, and sings.*

In youth when I did love, did love, 60  
Methought it was very sweet,  
To contract, O, the time, for, ah, my behove,  
O, methought there was nothing meet.

*Hamlet.* Has this fellow no feeling of his business, that he sings at grave-making? 65

*Horatio.* Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.

*Hamlet.* 'Tis e'en so: the hand of little employment hath the daintier sense.

*First Clown.* [*Sings*]

But age, with his stealing steps, 70  
Hath claw'd me in his clutch,  
And hath shipped me intil the land,  
As if I had never been such.

[*Throws up a skull.*

*Hamlet.* That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once: how the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jaw-bone, that did the first murder! It might be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o'er-reaches; one that would circumvent God, might it not?

*Horatio.* It might, my lord. 79

*Hamlet.* Or of a courtier; which could say "Good morrow, sweet lord! How dost thou, good lord?" This might be my lord such-a-one, that praised my lord such-a-one's horse, when he meant to beg it,—might it not?

*Horatio.* Ay, my lord. 84

*Hamlet.* Why, e'en so: and now my Lady Worm's; chapless, and knocked about the mazzard with a sexton's spade: here's fine revolution, an we had the trick to



see't. Did these bones cost no more the breeding, but to play at loggats with 'em? mine ache to think on't.

*First Clown.* [*Sings*]

A pickaxe, and a spade, a spade, 90

For and a shrouding-sheet:

O, a pit of clay for to be made

For such a guest is meet.

[*Throws up another skull.*]

*Hamlet.* There's another: why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery? Hum! This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries: is this the fine of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box; and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha? 107

*Horatio.* Not a jot more, my lord.

*Hamlet.* Is not parchment made of sheep-skins?

*Horatio.* Ay, my lord, and of calf-skins too. 110

*Hamlet.* They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that. I will speak to this fellow. Whose grave's this, sirrah?

*First Clown.* Mine, sir.

[*Sings*] O, a pit of clay for to be made 115

For such a guest is meet.

*Hamlet.* I think it be thine, indeed; for thou liest in't.

*First Clown.* You lie out on't, sir, and therefore it is not yours: for my part, I do not lie in't, and yet it is mine.

*Hamlet.* Thou dost lie in't, to be in't, and say it is thine: 'tis for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou liest.

*First Clown.* 'Tis a quick lie, sir; 'twill away again, from me to you. ✓

*Hamlet.* What man dost thou dig it for?

*First Clown.* For no man, sir. 125

*Hamlet.* What woman, then?

*First Clown.* For none, neither.

*Hamlet.* Who is to be buried in't?

*First Clown.* One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul, she's dead. 130

*Hamlet.* How absolute the knave is! we must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken note of it; the age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe. How long hast thou been a grave-maker? 136

*First Clown.* Of all the days i' the year, I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet o'ercame Fortinbras.

*Hamlet.* How long is that since? 139

*First Clown.* Cannot you tell that? every fool can tell that: it was the very day that young Hamlet was born; he that is mad, and sent into England.

*Hamlet.* Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

*First Clown.* Why, because he was mad: he shall recover his wits there; or, if he do not, it's no great matter there. 146

*Hamlet.* Why?

*First Clown.* 'Twill not be seen in him there; there ~~the men are as mad as he~~

*Hamlet.* How came he mad? 150

*First Clown.* Very strangely, they say.

*Hamlet.* How strangely?



*First Clown.* Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

*Hamlet.* Upon what ground?

*First Clown.* Why, here in Denmark: I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years. 156

*Hamlet.* How long will a man lie i' the earth ere he rot?

*First Clown.* I' faith, if he be not rotten before he die,—as we have many corses now-a-days that will scarce hold the laying in,—he will last you some eight year or nine year: a tanner will last you nine year. 161

*Hamlet.* Why he more than another?

*First Clown.* Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade that he will keep out water a great while; and your water is a sore decayer of your dead body. Here's a skull now; this skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years. 167

*Hamlet.* Whose was it?

*First Clown.* A mad fellow's it was: whose do you think it was? 170

*Hamlet.* Nay, I know not.

*First Clown.* A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! 'a poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester.

*Hamlet.* This? 175

*First Clown.* E'en that.

*Hamlet.* Let me see. [*Takes the skull*] Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! my gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? quite chap-

fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that. Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

*Horatio.* What's that, my lord? 190

*Hamlet.* Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' the earth?

*Horatio.* E'en so.

*Hamlet.* And smelt so? pah! [*Puts down the skull.*]

*Horatio.* E'en so, my lord. 195

*Hamlet.* To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole?

*Horatio.* 'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.

*Hamlet.* No, faith, not a jot; but to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it: as thus; Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel? 205

Imperious Cæsar, dead and turn'd to clay,

Might stop a hole to keep the wind away:

O, that that earth which kept the world in awe

Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw!

But soft! but soft! aside: here comes the king, 210

*Enter Priests, &c., in procession; the Corpse of OPHELIA, LAERTES and Mourners following; King, Queen, their trains, &c.*

The queen, the courtiers: who is this they follow?  
And with such maimed rites? This doth betoken  
The corse they follow did with desperate hand



Fordo it own life: 'twas of some estate. 214

Couch we awhile, and mark. [*Retiring with Horatio*

*Laertes.* What ceremony else?

*Hamlet.* That is Laertes,

A very noble youth: mark.

*Laertes.* What ceremony else?

*First Priest.* Her obsequies have been as far enlarged  
As we have warrantise: her death was doubtful; 220

And, but that great command o'ersways the order,

She should in ground unsanctified have lodged

Till the last trumpet; for charitable prayers,

Shards, flints and pebbles should be thrown on her:

Yet here she is allow'd her virgin crants,

Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home

Of bell and burial.

*Laertes.* Must there no more be done?

*First Priest.* No more be done:

We should profane the service of the dead

To sing a requiem and such rest to her 230

As to peace-parted souls.

*Laertes.* Lay her i' the earth;

And from her fair and unpolluted flesh

May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,

A ministering angel shall my sister be,

When thou liest howling.

*Hamlet.* What, the fair Ophelia! 235

*Queen.* Sweets to the sweet: farewell!

[*Scattering flowers.*

I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;

I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,

And not have strew'd thy grave.

*Laertes.* O, treble woe

Fall ten times treble on that cursed head

Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense  
Deprived thee of! Hold off the earth awhile,  
Till I have caught her once more in mine arms:

*[Leaps into the grave.]*

Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,  
Till of this flat a mountain you have made 245  
To o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head  
Of blue Olympus.

*Ham. [Advancing]* What is he whose grief  
Bears such an emphasis; whose phrase of sorrow  
Conjures the wandering stars and makes them stand  
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I, 250  
Hamlet the Dane. *[Leaps into the grave.]*

*Laertes* The devil take thy soul!

*[Grappling with him.]*

*Hamlet.* Thou pray'st not well.  
I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat;  
For, though I am not splenitive and rash,  
Yet have I something in me dangerous, 255  
Which let thy wisdom fear: hold off thy hand!

*King.* Pluck them asunder.

*Queen.*

Hamlet, Hamlet!

*All.* Gentlemen,—

*Horatio.*

Good my lord, be quiet.

*[The Attendants part them, and they  
come out of the grave.]*

*Hamlet.* Why, I will fight with him upon this theme  
Until my eyelids will no longer wag. 260

*Queen.* O my son, what theme?

*Hamlet.* I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love,  
Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

*King.* O, he is mad, Laertes.



*Queen.* For love of God, forbear him.

*Hamlet.* 'Swounds, show me what thou'lt do:  
 Woo't weep? woo't fight? woo't fast? woo't tear thyself?  
 Woo't drink up eisel? eat a crocodile?  
 I'll do't. Dost thou come here to whine? 270  
 To outface me with leaping in her grave?  
 Be buried quick with her, and so will I:  
 And if thou prate of mountains, let them throw  
 Millions of acres on us, till our ground,  
 Singeing his pate against the burning zone, 275  
 Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth,  
 I'll rant as well as thou.

*Queen.* This is mere madness:  
 And thus awhile the fit will work on him;  
 Anon, as patient as the female dove  
 When that her golden couplets are disclosed, 280  
 His silence will sit drooping.

*Hamlet.* Hear you, sir;  
 What is the reason that you use me thus?  
 I loved you ever: but it is no matter;  
 Let Hercules himself do what he may, 284  
 The cat will mew, and dog will have his day. [*Exit.*]

*King.* I pray you, good Horatio, wait upon him.  
 [*Exit Horatio.*]

[*To Laertes*] Strengthen your patience in our last night's  
 speech;

We'll put the matter to the present push.  
 Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son.  
 This grave shall have a living monument: 290  
 An hour of quiet shortly shall we see;  
 Till then, in patience our proceeding be. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *A hall in the castle.**Enter HAMLET and HORATIO.*

*Ham.* So much for this, sir: now shall you see the other;  
You do remember all the circumstance?

*Horatio.* Remember it, my lord!

*Hamlet.* Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting,  
That would not let me sleep: methought I lay 5  
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly,—  
And praised be rashness for it, let us know,  
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,  
When our deep plots do pall; and that should learn us  
There's a divinity that shapes our ends, 10  
Rough-hew them how we will,—

*Horatio.*

That is most certain.

*Hamlet.* Up from my cabin,  
My sea-gown scarf'd about me, in the dark  
Groped I to find out them: had my desire,  
Finger'd their packet, and in fine withdrew 15  
To mine own room again: making so bold,  
My fears forgetting manners, to unseal  
Their grand commission; where I found, Horatio,—  
O royal knavery!—an exact command,  
Larded with many several sorts of reasons, 20  
Importing Denmark's health and England's too,  
With, ho! such bugs and goblins in my life,  
That on the supervise, no leisure bated,  
No, not to stay the grinding of the axe,  
My head should be struck off:—

*Horatio.*

Is't possible?

25

*Hamlet.* Here's the commission: read it at more leisure.  
But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?



*Horatio.* I beseech you.

*Hamlet.* Being thus be-netted round with villanies,—  
Ere I could make a prologue to my brains, 30  
They had begun the play,—I sat me down,  
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair:  
I once did hold it, as our statists do,  
A baseness to write fair, and labour'd much  
How to forget that learning; but, sir, now 35  
It did me yeoman's service: wilt thou know  
The effect of what I wrote?

*Horatio.* Ay, good my lord.

*Hamlet.* An earnest conjuration from the king,—  
As England was his faithful tributary,  
As love between them like the palm might flourish, 40  
As peace should still her wheaten garland wear  
And stand a comma 'tween their amities;  
And many such-like "as'es" of great charge,—  
That, on the view and knowing of these contents,  
Without debatement further, more or less, 45  
He should the bearers put to sudden death,  
Not shriving-time allow'd.

*Horatio.* How was this seal'd?

*Hamlet.* Why, even in that was heaven ordinant.  
I had my father's signet in my purse,  
Which was the model of that Danish seal; 50  
Folded the writ up in form of the other,  
Subscribed it, gave't the impression, placed it safely,  
The changeling never known. Now, the next day  
Was our sea-fight; and what to this was sequent  
Thou know'st already. 55

*Horatio.* So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't.

*Hamlet.* Why, man, they did make love to this employ-  
ment;

They are not near my conscience; their defeat  
Doth by their own insinuation grow:

'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes  
Between the pass and fell incensed points  
Of mighty opposites. 60

*Horatio.* Why, what a king is this!

*Ham.* Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon,—  
He that hath kill'd my king, and stain'd my mother,  
Popp'd in between the election and my hopes,  
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,  
And with such cozenage,—is't not perfect conscience  
To quit him with this arm? and is't not to be damn'd  
To let this anker of our nature come  
In further evn? 65 70

*Hor.* It must be shortly known to him from England  
What is the issue of the business there.

*Hamlet.* It will be short: the interim is mine;  
And a man's life's no more than to say "one."  
But I am very sorry, good Horatio,  
That to Laertes I forgot myself;  
For, by the image of my cause, I see  
The portraiture of his: I'll court his favours:  
But, sure, the bravery of his grief did put me  
Into a towering passion. 75

*Horatio.* Peace! who comes here? 80

*Enter OSRIC.*

*Osric.* Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

*Hamlet.* I humbly thank you, sir. [*Aside to Horatio*]  
Dost know this water-fly?

*Horatio.* [*Aside to Hamlet*] No, my good lord. 84

*Hamlet.* [*Aside to Horatio*] Thy state is the more gra-  
cious; for 'tis a vice to know him. He hath much land,



and fertile: let a beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall stand at the king's mess: 'tis a chough; but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt. 89

*Osric.* Sweet lord, if your lordship were at leisure, I should impart a thing to you from his majesty.

*Hamlet.* I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit. Put your bonnet to his right use; 'tis for the head.

*Osric.* I thank your lordship, it is very hot. 94

*Ham.* No, believe me, 'tis very cold; the wind is northerly.

*Osric.* It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

*Hamlet.* But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot, or my complexion— 98

*Osric.* Exceedingly, my lord; it is very sultry,—as 'twere,—I cannot tell how. But, my lord, his majesty bade me signify to you, that he has laid a great wager on your head: sir, this is the matter,—

*Hamlet.* I beseech you, remember— 103

[*Hamlet moves him to put on his hat.*]

*Osric.* Nay, in good faith; for mine ease, in good faith. Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes; believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing: indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry, for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman would see. 110

*Hamlet.* Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you; though, I know, to divide him inventorially would dizzy the arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect of his quick sail. But, in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article; and his infusion of such dearth and rareness, as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror, and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more. 118



*Osric.* Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

*Hamlet.* The concernancy, sir? why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath?

*Osric.* Sir?

*Horatio.* Is't not possible to understand in another tongue? You will do't, sir, really. 124

*Ham.* What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

*Osric.* Of Laertes?

*Horatio.* His purse is empty already: all's golden words are spent.

*Hamlet.* Of him, sir.

*Osric.* I know you are not ignorant— 130

*Hamlet.* I would you did, sir; yet, in faith, if you did, it would not much approve me: well, sir.

*Osric.* You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is—

*Hamlet.* I dare not confess that, lest I should compare with him in excellence; but, to know a man well, were to know himself. 136

*Osric.* I mean, sir, for his weapon; but in the imputation laid on him by them, in his meed he's unfellowed.

*Hamlet.* What's his weapon?

*Osric.* Rapier and dagger. 140

*Hamlet.* That's two of his weapons: but, well.

*Osric.* The king, sir, hath wagered with him six Barbary horses: against the which he has imponed, as I take it, six French rapiers and poniards, with their assigns, as girdle, hangers, and so: three of the carriages, in faith, are very dear to fancy, very responsive to the hilts, most delicate carriages, and of very liberal conceit. 147

*Hamlet.* What call you the carriages?

*Horatio.* I knew you must be edified by the margent ere you had done. 150

*Osric.* The carriages, sir, are the hangers.



*Hamlet.* The phrase would be more germane to the matter, if we could carry cannon by our sides: I would it might be hangers till then. But, on: six Barbary horses against six French swords, their assigns, and three liberal-conceited carriages; that's the French bet against the Danish. Why is this "imponed," as you call it? 157

*Osric.* The king, sir, hath laid, that in a dozen passes between yourself and him, he shall not exceed you three hits: he hath laid on twelve for nine; and it would come to immediate trial, if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.

*Hamlet.* How if I answer no?

*Osric.* I mean, my lord, the opposition of your person in trial. 164

*Hamlet.* Sir, I will walk here in the hall: if it please his majesty, 'tis the breathing time of day with me; let the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the king hold his purpose, I will win for him ~~an~~ I can; if not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits.

*Osric.* Shall I re-deliver you e'en so? 170


*Hamlet.* To this effect, sir; after what flourish your nature will.

*Osric.* I commend my duty to your lordship.

*Hamlet.* Yours, yours. [*Exit Osric*] He does well to commend it himself; there are no tongues else for's turn.

*Horatio.* This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head. 177

*Hamlet.* He did comply with his dug, before he sucked it. Thus has he—and many more of the same bevy, that I know the drossy age dotes on—only got the tune of the time and outward habit of encounter; a kind of yesty collection, which carries them through and through the most fond and winnowed opinions; and do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out. 184



*Enter a Lord.*

*Lord.* My lord, his majesty commended him to you by young Osric, who brings back to him, that you attend him in the hall: he sends to know if your pleasure hold to play with Laertes, or that you will take longer time.

*Hamlet.* I am constant to my purposes; they follow the king's pleasure: if his fitness speaks, mine is ready; now or whensoever, provided I be so able as now. 191

*Lord.* The king and queen and all are coming down.

*Hamlet.* In happy time.

*Lord.* The queen desires you to use some gentle entertainment to Laertes before you fall to play. 195

*Hamlet.* She well instructs me. [*Exit Lord.*

*Horatio.* You will lose this wager, my lord.

*Hamlet.* I do not think so; since he went into France, I have been in continual practice; I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter. 201

*Horatio.* Nay, good my lord,—

*Hamlet.* It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman.

*Horatio.* If your mind dislike anything, obey it: I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit. 206

*Hamlet.* Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all: since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?



*Enter King, Queen, LAERTES, Lords, OSRIC, and Attendants  
with foils, &c.*

*King.* Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me.

*[The King puts Laertes' hand into Hamlet's.]*

*Hamlet.* Give me your pardon, sir: I have done you  
wrong;

But pardon't, as you are a gentleman.

215

This presence knows,

And you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd

With sore distraction. What I have done,

That might your nature, honour and exception

Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.

220

Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet:

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,

And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,

Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.

Who does it, then? His madness: if't be so,

225

Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd;

His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.

Sir, in this audience,

Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil

Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,

230

That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house,

And hurt my brother.

*Laertes.*

I am satisfied in nature,

Whose motive, in this case, should stir me most

To my revenge: but in my terms of honour

I stand aloof, and will no reconcilment

235

Till by some elder masters, of known honour,

I have a voice and precedent of peace,

To keep my name ungor'd. But till that time

I do receive your offer'd love like love,

And will not wrong it.

*Hamlet.* I embrace it freely, 240  
And will this brother's wager frankly play.  
Give us the foils. Come on.

*Laertes.* Come, one for me.

*Hamlet.* I'll be your foil, Laertes: in mine ignorance  
Your skill shall, like a star i' the darkest night,  
Stick fiery off indeed.

*Laertes.* You mock me, sir. 245

*Hamlet.* No, by this hand.

*King.* Give them the foils, young Osric. Cousin Hamlet,  
You know the wager?

*Hamlet.* Very well, my lord;  
Your grace hath laid the odds o' the weaker side.

*King.* I do not fear it; I have seen you both: 250  
But since he's better'd, we have therefore odds.

*Laertes.* This is too heavy, let me see another.

*Ham.* This likes me well. These foils have all a length?  
[*They prepare to play.*]

*Osric.* Ay, my good lord.

*King.* Set me the stoups of wine upon that table. 255  
If Hamlet give the first or second hit,  
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,  
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire;  
The king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath;  
And in the cup an union shall he throw, 260  
Richer than that which four successive kings  
In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups,  
And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,  
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,  
The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth, 265  
"Now the king drinks to Hamlet." Come, begin;  
And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.



*Hamlet.* Come on, sir.

*Laertes.* Come, my lord. [They play.

*Hamlet.* One.

*Laertes.* No.

*Hamlet.* Judgment.

*Osric.* A hit, a very palpable hit.

*Laertes.* Well; again. 269

*King.* Stay; give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is thine;  
Here's to thy health.

[Trumpets sound, and cannon shot off within.

Give him the cup.

*Hamlet.* I'll play this bout first; set it by awhile.

Come. [They play] Another hit; what say you?

*Laertes.* A touch, a touch, I do confess. 274

*King.* Our son shall win.

*Queen.* He's fat, and scant of breath.

Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows:

The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

*Hamlet.* Good madam!

*King.* Gertrude, do not drink.

*Queen.* I will, my lord; I pray you, pardon me. 279

[Drinks.

*King.* [Aside] It is the poison'd cup; it is too late.

*Hamlet.* I dare not drink yet, madam; by and by.

*Queen.* Come, let me wipe thy face.

*Laertes.* My lord, I'll hit him now.

*King.* I do not think't.

*Laer.* [Aside] And yet 'tis almost 'gainst my conscience.

*Hamlet.* Come, for the third, Laertes: you but dally; 285

I pray you, pass with your best violence;

I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

*Laertes.* Say you so? come on. [They play.

*Osric.* Nothing, neither way. 289

*Laertes.* Have at you now !

[*Laertes wounds Hamlet ; then, in scuffling,  
they change rapiers, and Hamlet wounds  
Laertes.*

*King.* Part them ; they are incensed.

*Hamlet.* Nay, come, again. [The Queen falls.

*Osric.* Look to the queen there, ho !

*Horatio.* They bleed on both sides. How is it, my lord ?

*Osric.* How is't, Laertes ?

*Laertes.* Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric ;  
I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery. 295

*Ham.* How does the queen ?

*King.* She swoons to see them bleed.

*Queen.* No, no, the drink, the drink,—O my dear  
Hamlet,—

The drink, the drink !—I am poison'd. [Dies.

*Hamlet.* O villany ! Ho ! let the door be lock'd :  
Treachery ! seek it out. 300

*Laertes.* It is here, Hamlet : Hamlet, thou art slain ;  
No medicine in the world can do thee good,  
In thee there is not half an hour of life ;  
The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,  
Unbated and envenom'd : the foul practice 305  
Hath turn'd itself on me ; lo, here I lie,  
Never to rise again : thy mother's poison'd :  
I can no more : the king, the king's to blame.

*Hamlet.* The point envenom'd too ! 309  
Then, venom, to thy work. [Stabs the King.

*All.* Treason ! treason !

*King.* O, yet defend me, friends ; I am but hurt.

*Ham.* Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,  
Drink off this potion :—is thy union here ?  
Follow my mother. [King dies.



*Laertes.* He is justly served; 315  
 It is a poison temper'd by himself.  
 Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet:  
 Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,  
 Nor thine on me! [*Dies.*]

*Hamlet.* Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee. 321  
 I am dead, Horatio. Wretched queen, adieu!  
 You that look pale and tremble at this chance,  
 That are but mutes or audience to this act,  
 Had I but time,—as this fell sergeant, death,  
 Is strict in his arrest,—O, I could tell you,— 325  
 But let it be.—Horatio, I am dead;  
 Thou livest; report me and my cause aright  
 To the unsatisfied.

*Horatio.* Never believe it:  
 I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:  
 Here's yet some liquor left.

*Hamlet.* As thou'rt a man, 330  
 Give me the cup: let go; by heaven, I'll have't.  
 O good Horatio, what a wounded name,  
 Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!  
 If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,  
 Absent thee from felicity awhile, 335  
 And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
 To tell my story.

[*March at some distance, and shot within.*]

What warlike noise is this?

*Osric.* Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from  
 Poland,  
 To the ambassadors of England gives  
 This warlike volley.

*Hamlet.* O, I die, Horatio; 340  
 The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit:

I cannot live to hear the news from England;  
But I do prophesy the election lights  
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice;  
So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less,  
Which have solicited—the rest is silence.

345

[Dies.

*Horatio.* ~~Now cracks a noble heart: good night, sweet prince;~~

~~And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!~~

~~Why does the drum come hither?~~

[March within.

*Enter FORTINBRAS, the English Ambassadors, and others.*

*Fortinbras.* Where is this sight?

*Horatio.*

What is it ye would see?

If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search.

351

*Fortinbras.* This quarry cries on havoc. O proud Death,  
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,  
That thou so many princes at a shot  
So bloodily hast struck?

*First Ambassador.* The sight is dismal;  
And our affairs from England come too late:  
The ears are senseless that should give us hearing,  
To tell him his commandment is fulfill'd,  
That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead:  
Where should we have our thanks?

355

*Horatio.*

Not from his mouth,

Had it the ability of life to thank you:

361

He never gave commandment for their death.

But since, so jump upon this bloody question,

You from the Polack wars, and you from England,

• Are here arrived, give order that these bodies

365

High on a stage be placed to the view;

And let me speak to the yet unknowing world



How these things came about: so shall you hear  
Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,  
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,  
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause;  
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook  
Fall'n on the inventors' heads: all this can I  
Truly deliver.

370

*Fortinbras.* Let us haste to hear it,  
And call the noblest to the audience.  
For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune:  
I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,  
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.

375

*Horatio.* Of that I shall have also cause to speak,  
And from his mouth whose voice will draw on more:  
But let this same be presently perform'd,  
Even while men's minds are wild; lest more mischance,  
On plots and errors, happen.

380

*Fortinbras.* Let four captains  
Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;  
For he was likely, had he been put on,  
To have proved most royally: and, for his passage,  
The soldiers' music and the rites of war  
Speak loudly for him.

385

Take up the bodies: such a sight as this  
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.  
Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

390

[*A dead march. Exeunt, bearing off the dead bodies;  
after which a peal of ordnance is shot off.*]



## NOTES.

G.=*Glossary*. Several other abbreviations used sometimes in the *Notes* are explained at the beginning of the *Glossary*, in which they occur more frequently. They should be observed; see p. 214.

By "the Folio" is meant the First Folio (1623); by "the Quarto" the Second Quarto (1604).

## ACT I.

### Scene 1.

*A platform before the castle.* The scene as staged in the modern theatre is wonderfully impressive: the dim battlements towering on one side, and the starlit (36) sea stretching far below (1. 4. 70, 71) on the other.

The element of mystery that pervades *Hamlet* is introduced at the outset, as in *Macbeth*, where the appearance of the Witches in the first scene is meant to "strike the keynote of the character of the whole drama." And in each scene, though in different ways, the scene and setting are carefully adjusted to suit the introduction of the supernatural element. Thus here "the armour, the dead silence, the watchfulness that first interrupts it, the welcome relief of the guard, the cold,...all excellently accord with, and prepare for, the after gradual rise into tragedy"—*Coleridge*. He notes that "a state of cold or chilling damp from without, and of anxiety inwardly," such a state as the dramatist here depicts in the soldiers on guard, is that in which human nature is most susceptible to the idea of supernatural manifestations. The whole prelude (1—40) vibrates with the thrill and hush of mystery. Note, too, how vivid an impression is conveyed in 70—125 of the state of unrest and uncertainty in Denmark, and how the vision is brought into relation with this state (121—125).



2. *me*; emphatic: it was not for Bernardo, the new-comer, to challenge Francisco, the sentinel on guard.

6. *upon*, just at; implying 'just before'; so we say 'close upon twelve' (i.e. o'clock). Francisco evidently does not know that it has just ("now") struck twelve.

8. *For this relief much thanks*. One of the many passages in *Hamlet* that have become familiar quotations. *relief*; cf. 17.

13. *rivals*, partners; see G.

*bid them make haste*. Bernardo is anxious not to be alone on the watch for the same reason that Francisco is glad to be off guard.

16. Either "*God* give you" or "*I* give you" (=I wish you).

19. *A piece of him*; a careless, humorous reply, meant to contrast Horatio's light, sceptical mood (23, 24, 30) with the very different feelings of Marcellus and Bernardo. Some think that Horatio accompanies and explains the words by a handshake.

29. *He may...speak to it*; explained by line 42. *approve*, confirm the evidence of, prove them to be correct.

33. *What we have...seen*; dependent on the general sense 'relate' in 31, rather than in apposition to 'story' in 32.

35. *Last night of all*, i.e. it was ~~only~~ (or *but*) last night that etc.; the ellipse is 'of all nights.'

36. *yond same star*, i.e. "any bright star that happened to be, at the hour at that date, W. of the polar star" (= "the pole"); apparently a planet (cf. "course") is meant.

37. *his*, its; cf. "it" in 38, and see *his* in G.

42. *Thou art a scholar*; and so able to address the Ghost in Latin, the language used by magicians and witches in invoking spirits. Cf. Hamlet's *Hic et ubique* in I. 5. 156; and *Much Ado About Nothing*, II. 1. 263, 264: "You shall find her the infernal Ate...I would to God some scholar would conjure her." Editors quote from Beaumont and Fletcher's play, *The Night-Walker*, II. 1:

"Let's call the butler up, for he speaks Latin,  
And that would daunt the devil."

44. Coleridge notes how true to human nature it is that Horatio the sceptic should be the last to speak: he had been so positive in his incredulity (30), and its overthrow has been so swift and absolute.

48. *Denmark*, i.e. the King of Denmark; cf. "Norway" in 61. In the English historical plays "England" (cf. IV. 3. 57) and "France" often mean the respective kings of the two countries.

49. *sometimes*, formerly.



56. *Before my God*; note the solemn form of the asseveration, often clipped to "'fore God!" as in II. 2. 447.

*might*, could; cf. *may* = 'can' in I. 4. 51.

57. *sensible*; in the active sense, 'perceiving.' *avouch*, warrant.

62. *parle*, parley.

63. *the sledded Polacks* = the Poles who travel in *sleds* (i.e. sledges); rather than 'the Poles in their sleds.' The elder Hamlet angrily broke up a conference held in winter and fiercely assailed the Polish army: an incident so important as fully to account for Horatio's reminiscence. But see p. 227.

65. *jump*, exactly, just; cf. V. 2. 363, and *Othello*, II. 3. 392, "And bring him jump when he may Cassio find."

68. *in the gross and scope of*, according to the general drift of.

70—79. See p. 235. *toils the subject*, causes the people to toil. *the subject*; used collectively; cf. I. 2. 33.

74. *mart*, trafficking for, purchase of.

75. *impress*, forced service. Cf. the old system of 'press-gangs' for the navy. Shakespeare uses *press* and *impress* several times with this idea of compulsory military service.

77. *toward*, about to happen, imminent; cf. V. 2. 353.

83. *emulate*; used actively = 'emulating, emulous.'

84. *our valiant Hamlet*, i.e. "our last king" (80); cf. 95.

87. *law and heraldry*, i.e. the strict legal covenant and the obligation, in point of honour, imposed by the law of arms. (F.)

89. *stood*; Shakespeare often uses *stand* practically as an emphatic auxiliary. *seized*, possessed; a legal use still current. The whole passage (86—95) is a good illustration of Shakespeare's partiality for legal imagery and diction.

90. *a moiety competent*, an equivalent amount of lands.

92. *inheritance*, possession. Elizabethans often use *inherit* = 'to have, possess,' without (as now) the notion of 'heirship' (Lat. *heres*, 'an heir'). So in the Prayer-Book, "bless thine inheritance"—that is, 'thy people, thy peculiar possession.' Cf. V. 1. 107.

94. *carriage of the article design'd*; the tenour of the clause bearing on (drawn up with reference to) the point. *article*; a clause or provision in a law or treaty or agreement.

96. *unimproved*; "not regulated or guided by knowledge or experience"—*Johnson*; 'untutored.'

97. *in the skirts of*, i.e. in outlying parts, where the central authority least makes itself felt.



98. *Shark'd up*, picked up indiscriminately, as a shark picks up its prey.

100. *a stomach in't*, i.e. a spice of danger; *stomach* often has the sense 'spirit,' 'stubborn courage.'

101. *state*, statesmen, rulers.

106, 107. *head*, occasion; the metaphor of a 'fountain-head,' source of a river; cf. II. 2. 25. *romage*, bustle; see G.

109—125. These lines are omitted in the Folio. The account of the omens that preceded Cæsar's death resembles closely the account in *Julius Cæsar*, I. 3, II. 2. Shakespeare himself, on reconsideration, or the editors of the Folio, may have thought that this passage (which could be easily detached) bore too close a resemblance to the passages in *Julius Cæsar*, where the introduction of the omens has great dramatic significance. Shakespeare took the omens (but expanded them), like the rest of the materials for *Julius Cæsar*, from North's translation (1579) of Plutarch's *Lives*.

109. *sort*; either 'fall out, happen,' or 'suit,' i.e. accord with your supposition (104—107). The word has both senses in Shakespeare.

112. *A mote* etc.; i.e. a thing as troubling to the mental vision as a particle of dust is to the natural eye. Horatio is not belittling the incident.

113. *state*, community; not 'condition,' as if he meant 'when Rome was at her zenith.'

114. *A little ere*. Similarly Plutarch speaks of the portents as occurring "before Cæsar's death." In *Julius Cæsar* Shakespeare concentrates them on the very last night of Cæsar's life.

"It is evident that the character and history of Julius Cæsar had taken a strong hold of Shakespeare's imagination. There is perhaps no other historical character who is so repeatedly alluded to throughout his plays."

115, 116. *Did squeak and gibber*. The classical poets assign a shrill piping voice to the 'ghosts' or souls of the dead. Cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, XXIV. 5 *et seq.*, where the souls of Penelope's suitors are described as "gibbering (*τρίζουσας*) like bats."

117. A line must have dropped out; it probably mentioned that there were portents in the sky no less strange than those on earth (115, 116).

*stars with trains of fire*, i.e. comets. Plutarch mentions "the great comet [said to be Halley's comet], which seven nights together was seen very bright *after* Cæsar's death." The appearance of a comet was



traditionally held an evil omen; it "betokeneth," says an old writer, Batman (1582), "changing of kings and is a token of pestilence or of war."

118. *Disaster* is essentially a word belonging to astrology and signifying "an unfavourable aspect of a star or planet." Probably an eclipse is meant here. *the moist star*, the moon. The epithet is an allusion to the moon's influence on the sea, causing ebb and flow.

119. *influence*; another astrological word; see G. *stands*, depends.

120. *almost to doomsday*, i.e. "almost to the point of complete darkness, alluding to the biblical prophecy that at the second coming of Christ 'the moon shall not give her light' (Matt. xxiv. 29)" — *Herford*. An eclipse was proverbially an evil omen. Cf. *Paradise Lost*, I. 596—599.

122. *harbingers*, forerunners; see G. *still*, ever, constantly.

123. *omen*; here put for 'the calamity portended by the evil signs.'

125. *climatures*, regions.

127. *I'll cross it, though it blast me*. An old superstition.

*blast*, a favourite Elizabethan word for 'to strike with pernicious influence, to cause to sicken or wither.'

129. The broken lines express strong agitation.

134. *happily*, haply, perchance.

136—139. Editors quote from Elizabethan and other writers various illustrations of this and the other superstitions mentioned (149—164). The great storehouse of these beliefs in Shakespeare's time was Reginald Scot's *Discoverie* [i.e. uncovering, exposure] of *Witchcraft* (1584), and later, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

140. *partisan*, a spear with a broad head.

150—155. Cf. *King Lear*, III. 4. 120, 121: "This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet: he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock."

153. It was an old belief that there were four classes of spirits or "demons," associated respectively with the four "elements," i.e. Salamanders (spirits of fire), Sylphs (of air), Nymphs (of water = "sea"), and Gnomes (of underground). Hence the idea of this passage is that the disembodied spirits of the dead are equally at home in all four elements.

154. *extravagant...erring*; each in its literal sense 'roaming, wandering'; the former, perhaps, has more of the notion 'vagrant.' Lat. *extra*, 'beyond' + *vagari*, 'to wander.' For *erring* (Lat. *errare*, 'to wander'), cf. the old phrase "the *erring* stars" = 'the planets,' opposed to the "fixed" stars.



155. Scan *confine*, as in *The Tempest*, IV. 120—122.

156. *probation*, proof; not 'proving, testing,' as usually.

161. *spirit*; scan as a monosyllable *sp'rit*, almost = *sprite*.

162. *strike*, blast, destroy by their noxious "influence" (119); used especially of the planets. Cf. *Titus Andronicus*, II. 4. 14, 15:

"If I do wake, some planet strike me down,

That I may slumber in eternal sleep!"

In Shakespeare's time the moon was reckoned a "planet," and we still have *moon-struck*.

163. *takes*, bewitches, or 'blasts with disease'; see G.

165. *in part*; still the half-sceptical Horatio, as in 138 ("they say") and 149 ("I have heard").

166. *in russet mantle*. Either 'grey' or 'red, reddish' suits *russet* in Elizabethan E. and here the context makes 'grey' the more likely, as indicating the earlier period.

170. *young Hamlet*. "Note the unobtrusive and yet fully adequate mode of introducing the main character, 'young Hamlet,' upon whom is transferred all the interest excited for the acts and concerns of the king his father"—*Coleridge*.

## Scene 2.

Uneasiness and insincerity try instinctively to disguise themselves in artificial, high-flown language, as in the first part of Claudius's speech. When he passes from the difficult, personal theme, and speaks of the affairs of his kingdom, then we note a simpler tone and "a certain appropriate majesty." For Claudius has great capacity: otherwise, indeed, he would not be where he is: he shows most insight into Hamlet's character. In the acting of *Hamlet*, the part of Claudius proves very effective.

2. *That* is often in Shakespeare added to conjunctions without affecting the sense; cf. 'since *that*,' 'though *that*,' 'when *that*.'

8. *sometime*, former; cf. *King Lear*, I. 2. 122, where Lear, having cast off Cordelia, calls her his "sometime daughter."

9. *jointress to*, partner in; literally 'joint possessor in relation to.'

10. *defeated*, marred, spoilt; the word retains the etymological idea of 'undo' (F. *défaire*).

11. *auspicious...dropping*, i.e. full at once of gladness and grief.

13. *dole*; O.F. *doel*, Mod. F. *deuil*; cf. Lat. *dolor*, 'pain.'

14—16. It is part of Claudius's diplomatic flattery to represent that in the matter of this marriage he has sought the counsel ("your



*better* wisdoms"), and received the full approval, of the great nobles, to whom, no doubt, he owed his election to the throne.

14. *to wife*; a common idiom in which *to* = 'equivalent to,' 'for.' Cf. the Prayer-Book, "I take thee to my wedded wife"; and *Luke* iii. 8, "we have Abraham to our father."

20. *out of frame*, out of gear; cf. "out of joint," I. 4. 189.

21. *Colleagued*; agreeing, I think, with "Fortinbras," like the participles in 18, 19. Interpret 'with this imaginary superiority for his only ally.' (F.)

32. *proportions*; the word implies the requisite preparation (i.e. in "proportion" to the need) of troops and equipment.

33. *subject*; cf. I. 1. 72.

38. *delated*, set forth in detail. *allow*; plural because attracted to "articles"; a very common grammatical occurrence.

44, 45. *You cannot speak*; no favour, within reason, that Laertes asks of the King of Denmark will be denied him.

49. What the King primarily refers to is the assistance Polonius must have given him in securing the throne to which "young Hamlet" was the natural, though not the necessary, heir (F.). But the line would cover also Polonius's service under the elder Hamlet.

56. *pardon*, permission.

64. *cousin*, nephew; see G.

65. *A little more than kin, and less than kind*. It is significant that Hamlet's first words should be a riddle, and cast in that style of ironical jesting which he uses so effectively (cf. *Richard II.*).

Hamlet echoes bitterly Claudius's own very unfortunate reference to the *peculiar relationship* between them: *kin* being a glance at "cousin," and *kind* at "son." Compare Hamlet's grim words in II. 2. 359. Probably Hamlet speaks to himself, and of himself, with the meaning: 'I am indeed something more than merely your kinsman ("cousin"), but very far from a "son" in kind feelings towards you.'

There is obviously a bitter quibble on *kin* and *kind*; and probably *kind* means 'disposed according to *kind* or species,' i.e. 'disposed as a "son" should be, filled with natural, filial feelings.' For Shakespeare often uses *kind* and *unkind* of children, with this notion. Thus Goneril and Regan are Lear's "unkind daughters" (III. 4. 73) in the two senses "unnatural" and "hard-hearted." Claudius himself is called *kindless*, II. 2. 558, because he has proved himself so unnatural in his feelings and actions towards his brother and the Queen.

Some editors believe that Hamlet's words here apply to the King.



67. *I am too much i' the sun.* The metaphor continues that of the previous line, and *sun* is probably a quibble on *son* in 64. Hamlet means that "he is too much in the sunshine of the court, and too much in the relation of son—son to a dead father, son to an incestuous mother, son to an uncle-father. It was suggested by Johnson that there is an allusion to the proverbial expression (see *Lear*, II. 2. 168): 'Out of God's blessing into a warm sun,' which means to be out of house and home [i.e. fallen into an inferior condition]; Hamlet is deprived of the throne"—*Dowden*.

The proverb probably referred "to the haste of the congregation to leave the shelter of the church immediately after the priest's benediction, running from God's blessing into the warm sun"—*Skeat*; or to the laxity of leaving the church before the end of the service.

70. *vailed*, downcast; see G.

83. *me*; emphatic; contrasting himself with her.

87. For the accentuation *commendable* cf. *Coriolanus*, IV. 7. 51.

92. *obsequious*, mourning; the word several times in Shakespeare has the notion 'pertaining to *obsequies* or mourning for the dead.'

*perséver*; always spelt and accented thus by Shakespeare; cf. *King John*, II. 421, "Perséver not, but hear me, mighty kings."

98, 99. i.e. as common as the most familiar object that is perceptible by our senses.

106, 107. *throw to earth*, cast from you; a curious phrase, but the thought in Claudius's mind is, 'let it be buried in your father's grave'—"earth to earth and dust to dust." *unprevailing*, unavailing.

109. *immediate*. "The throne of Denmark was elective; see V. 2. 65, 343, 344; but Hamlet was the probable successor to Claudius"—*Dowden*. Hamlet never calls Claudius explicitly a usurper, though he had got the better of Hamlet at the vacancy. (F.)

112. *Do I impart*. When he began (cf. "with" in 110) he was going to use some phrase like "am I disposed."

112—114. Why does Hamlet wish to get back to the University?

113. *to school*; in Shakespeare's time students went up to the University as boys; the Earl of Essex was in his tenth year, Bacon 12, when they were sent to Trinity College, Cambridge.

*Wittenberg*. "The University...of Wittenberg, founded in 1502, was for the play-going public above all the scene of the 'tragical life and death of Dr Faustus' [in Marlowe's great play]. To Protestant England at large it was the university of Luther"—*Herford*. It was to the door of the Schlosskirche of Wittenberg that Luther, who had been



appointed Professor of Philosophy in 1508, nailed his famous 95 theses in 1517. The University was merged in the University of Halle in 1817. Wittenberg lies on the Elbe in the Prussian province of Saxony, about 50 miles south of Berlin.

114. *retrograde*, opposite. "A word borrowed from astrology. When the planets were retrograde, that is, when they were going away from the earth's orbit, they were under certain circumstances hostile to human plans." (F.)

115. Claudius was influenced by the Queen's obvious wish that Hamlet should remain at home.

121—128. Spoken with forced geniality and assurance.

125. *Denmark*, i.e. the King himself.

126—128. A piece of "local colour," the custom referred to being essentially Danish. *Rouse* is a Scandinavian word for 'drinking deep, free quaffing,' and its repeated use in *Hamlet* is therefore noticeable; cf. I. 4. 8, II. 1. 55. *bruit*; see G.

129—158. The dramatic purpose of this soliloquy is to amplify that impression of Hamlet's character in general, and that insight into his present feelings, which we have gained from what has preceded. This purpose is important at this point because Hamlet is on the eve of the revelation which will make or mar his whole life.

129. *too too*; an intensive reduplication, common in Elizabethan E.

130. *resolve*, dissolve.

132. *canon*, law, i.e. the Sixth Commandment. The Hamlet of the pre-Christian tale would not have felt this scruple.

134. *all the uses*, the whole routine. "Hamlet's brooding melancholy leads him to take a morbid pleasure in making things worse than they are"—*Hudson*. (F.)

135—137. The very spirit of Job: "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked" (ix. 24). But in the end of *Hamlet* we find that the "weeds" (note this metaphor again in III. 4. 150) are uprooted, and "possession" placed in worthy hands. *merely*, entirely.

139, 140. *to*, compared with; literally 'in relation to.'

140. *Hyperion*, the sun-god; cf. III. 4. 56. Strictly, he was one of the Titans and the father of Helios, the sun (Lat. *Phæbus*), and the name should be pronounced *Hyperion*. But the identification of *Hyperion* with *Helios* is as old as Homer, and the accentuation *Hypérion*, instead of *Hyperion*, is said to occur in Spenser and other Elizabethans. Indeed, *Hypérion* has established itself firmly in English poetry, probably through these passages in *Hamlet*.



*satyr*; one of the sylvan gods (Gk. Σάτυροι, Lat. *Satyræ*) of classical mythology, half human in form, half goatlike.

141. *beteem*, allow; see G.

146. Another example of Hamlet's morbid generalising; from the "frailty" of one woman he condemns the whole sex. But, not yet knowing the facts, Hamlet brings the wrong charge against his mother, viz. of mere inconstancy in marrying again so soon.

147. *or ere*; see G.

149. *Niobe*; a type of maternal grief. In mythology she was the wife of Amphion, King of Thebes; all her children, 7 sons and 7 daughters, were slain by the arrows of Apollo and Diana, and Zeus, at her own prayer, transformed her into a stone, which during the summer always shed tears.

150. *discourse of reason*; a not uncommon phrase = 'the faculty of reasoning'; strictly *discourse* = (1) 'the act of the understanding, by which it passes from premises to consequences,' hence (2) 'reasoning, thought.'

155. *flushing*, redness, i.e. 'before her tears had had time to redden her eyes.'

157. *not...cannot*; for the double negative, common in Shakespeare as a form of emphasis, cf. III. i. 163, 164.

162. *change*, exchange. *that name*, viz. "friend."

179. *baked meats*, pastry; also written *bakemeats*, as in *Genesis* xl. 17 (the baker's dream told to Joseph). The reference here is to the old custom of providing a cold entertainment for the mourners at a funeral.

181. *dearest*, deadliest, bitterest; see G.

184. *Where, my lord?* For the moment Horatio takes Hamlet's last words literally, as is not unnatural; cf. 188.

*mind's eye*; he uses Horatio's phrase I. i. 112 (by a touch of "irony").

189. *Saw who?* The neglect of the inflexion is very common.

191. *Season your admiration*, qualify your astonishment.

197. *the dead vast*, the void still as death itself (cf. I. i. 65); cf. "vast of night" in *The Tempest*, I. 2. 327. The word implies the vacancy of night, conceived as the *waste*, the silent, desolate time. The Folio has *waste*.

199. *Armed at point*, fully armed (and so ready for any emergency). The Folio's reading "at all points"—cf. *Richard II.* 3. 2—suggests that the old phrase *at point* was then (1623) becoming obsolete.

*cap-a-pe*, head to foot; O.F. *de cap à pied* (in mod. F. *de pied en cap*).

203, 204. *distill'd*, melted. *act*, effect, operation.



211. i.e. not more like each other than the apparition was like your father.

215. *it head*; the uninflected use of *it* as a possessive; see *his* in G. Fourteen instances of this use of *it* have been noted in the Folio. (F.)

229. *beaver*, the visor (i.e. upper part) of the helmet; see G.

234. *constantly*, fixedly.

235. *amazed*; a stronger word in Elizabethan E. than now; 'confounded with astonishment.' Cf. II. 2. 541.

237. *tell*, count; cf. *tale* = 'number' (Germ. *zahl*), as in "the tale of bricks," *Exodus* v. 18.

241. *silver'd*, i.e. streaked with grey.

247. *tenable*, kept, retained. The passive use here illustrates the variable character of the adjectival terminations in Elizabethan E.

255. *doubt*, suspect; cf. I. 5. 40, 41. His first hint at foul play.

256, 257. *foul deeds* etc. Should Hamlet here turn to the vacant throne?

### Scene 3.

One of the most striking illustrations of Shakespeare's observance of the principle of dramatic relief is the use of scenes that stand out from the main scheme of design and colour, and thereby serve to set it off. Thus the sixth scene of *Macbeth* (I. 6), in contrast with the lurid, fiercely dramatic scenes that precede and follow, might be described as a "lyric movement": a shaft of soft light between two masses of storm-cloud.

3. *convoy*, conveyance, means of sending a letter.

6. *a fashion*, a compliance with the mode; Laertes means that it seems to Hamlet 'the right thing' to be paying court to someone.

*a toy in blood*, a mere whim of passion. *toy*; see G.

7. *primy*, in its springtime.

9. *suppliance*, entertainment, amusement for.

11. *crescent*; so *crescive* in the same sense, *Henry V.* I. 1. 66; Lat. *crescens*, 'growing, increasing.'

12. *this temple*; a Scriptural image: "ye are the temple of the living God," 2 *Corinthians* vi. 16; so in 1 *Cor.* iii. 16, 17.

15. *cautel*, deceit; see G.

19. *unvalued*, of no account.

20. *Carve for himself*; literally 'help himself to a dish,' hence figuratively 'do as he likes, indulge his taste.'



33. *keep you in the rear of*; "do not advance so far as your affection would lead you."

35. *chariest*, modestest, most scrupulous.

37. Cf. Hamlet's words to Ophelia, III. i. 136, 137.

38. *canker*, canker-worm; see G. and cf. *Lycidas*, 45, "As killing as the canker to the rose."

39. *buttons*, buds; F. *bouton* is used similarly.

*disclosed*, unclosed, opened; cf. the noun in III. i. 166.

40, 41. The allusion is to the rank mists and damps of morning, before the sun has warmed the atmosphere.

42, 43. The rhyme of proverbial wisdom. As an adviser in regard to the seamy side of life Laertes shows himself the true son of his father.

46. *ungracious*, without grace.

47. *Matthew* vii. 13, 14. Cf. the allegorical description in *The Faerie Queene*, I. 10, of the Hill of Contemplation, whence the Red-cross Knight saw (55) "A little path, that was both steepe and long," leading up to New Jerusalem.

48, 49. *puff'd*, bloated. *Himself*, i.e. the "ungracious pastor" (46). There is a slight change of construction.

*the primrose path*; repeated in the 'Porter's Speech' of *Macbeth* II. 3. 20—22, "I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire." This *Hamlet* parallel is a strong point in favour of the authenticity of that disputed speech.

50. *recks not his own rede*, disregards his own counsel.

*rede*; see G. *me*, for me.

58. This interview is a means of showing Polonius's character through the essentially worldly advice he gives his son. His philosophy of life is a foil to Hamlet's unworldliness.

The moralising and didactic note is very marked in Elizabethan literature: witness Bacon's *Essays*. The Reformation had led society to think and moralise for itself.

*character*, inscribe; for the accentuation cf. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II. 7. 3, 4:

"Who art the table wherein all my thoughts  
Are visibly *charáctér'd* and engraved."

Gk. *χαρακτήρ*, 'a stamp on a coin, seal, etc., engraved mark.'

59. *unproportion'd*: perhaps 'reckless, headlong,' from the notion 'not qualified by, not adapted to, the circumstances.'



60. i.e. "be easy in your manners but do not make yourself cheap."

62. *hoops*; representing 'that which binds together into unity,' like the hoops or rings round a cask; *hooks*, the metaphor of grappling-hooks (IV. 6. 17), is a bad change, as it implies hostility. (F.)

64—68. *comrade*; as in I *Henry IV.* IV. 1. 96. Laertes's own conduct later illustrates Polonius's counsel. *censure*, opinion; see G.

70. i.e. free from anything fanciful, e.g. extremes of fashion.

73. Probably Shakespeare intended *generous* to convey somehow the notion 'nobly born' (Lat. *generosus*) rather than 'liberal.' Paraphrase: 'show all the fastidiousness of the aristocrat.' *chief in that*, especially in that respect, i.e. in the matter of "apparel."

76. *husbandry*, thrift.

77—79. *to thine ownself be true* etc. Too fine a thought, one feels, for Polonius; it is, surely, Shakespeare's own sentiment, as in *King John*, V. 7. 117, 118:

"Nought shall make us rue,  
If England to itself do rest but true."

80. *season this*, may my blessing make this advice bear fruit in you in due season. For *season* = 'mature, ripen,' cf. again III. 3. 86.

82. *tend*; in the sense of *attend*, 'await' (F. *attendre*); cf. IV. 3. 44.

93. *put on*, 'impressed on.'

100. *green*, inexperienced, raw.

101. *Unsifted*, untried, untested. *perilous*; scan *per'lous*, like the colloquial form *parlous*.

106. *sterling*; see G. *Tender*, look after; or 'value, regard.'

114. *springs to catch woodcocks*; a proverbial saying. The woodcock, being easily caught in snares ("springs"), was thought to have no brains and so became typical of stupidity. Cf. V. 2. 294. When Malvolio picks up the letter by which he is duped, one of the plotters says: "Now is the woodcock near the gin" (*Twelfth Night*, II. 5. 92).

117. *extinct*, extinguished, quenched = Lat. *extinctus*.

121. *entreatments*. The *New E. Dict.* interprets 'conversations, interviews.' Some say 'his solicitations of you.'

126. *brokers*, go-betweens.

127. *investments*, robes; i.e. the white vestments of a priest, as in the only other place where Shakespeare uses it—2 *Henry IV.* IV. 1. 45, "Whose *white* investments figure innocence" (said to the Archbishop). The word affects the metaphor of the whole passage (127—130), e.g. *bonds* in 129 = 'marriage-bonds.'

132. *slander*, bring scandal on.



## Scene 4.

“The unimportant conversation with which this scene opens is a proof of Shakespeare’s minute knowledge of human nature. It is a well-established fact, that, on the brink of any serious enterprise, or event of moment, men almost invariably endeavour to elude the pressure of their own thoughts by turning aside to trivial objects and familiar circumstances”—*Coleridge*.

2. *eager*, sharp, biting; F. *aigre*, Lat. *acer*. Cf. I. 5. 69.

8—12. Cf. I. 2. 124—128. The King’s revel is designedly a contrast to the scene of watching on the battlements. From a scenic point of view the contrast may be made very effective, with the lights of the banqueting-hall in the far background. *wake*, keep late revel.

9. *wassail*, a carousing, drinking; see G.

*up-spring*; of course, the accusative after “reels.” It is another touch of northern local colour, such as Shakespeare may have got from his friends among the English players in Germany; the word being a translation of the German *Hüpfauft*, the name of a boisterous dance in vogue at the old German merry-makings. (See p. 235.)

10. *Rhene* was a common 17th century form for *Rhine* (Lat. *Rhenus*), so celebrated for its wine-growing districts. Cf. v. 1. 173.

11. *kettle-drum*; “this instrument was then characteristic of Denmark”—*Herford*.

12. *The triumph of his pledge*, “his glorious achievements as drinker.” See *Shakespeare’s England* (1916), I. 109.

*Is it a custom?* It seems odd that a Dane should ask the question. Perhaps, however, some distinction between different parts of Denmark is intended.

16. *More honour’d*, i.e. better disregarded than kept.

18. *tax’d of*, censured by; see G.

19, 20. *clepe*, call; see G. *with swinish phrase*, by speaking of us as pigs. *addition*, title; implying ‘good name.’

*it*, this drunkenness; a characteristic vice of the northern nations of Europe. See *Othello*, II. 3. 78—87 (with its reference to the Danes). Probably here, as certainly in that passage, Shakespeare is rebuking this vice in his own countrymen.

22. *attribute*, reputation; literally ‘what is attributed to us.’

24. *some vicious mole of nature*, some natural blemish. For *mole* = ‘a disfiguring spot on the body,’ cf. *King John*, III. 1. 47, “Patch’d with foul moles and eye-offending marks.”



26. *his*, its; see G.

27. *complexion*, natural bent of character contrasted with an acquired "habit"; see G.

30. *plausible*, attractive.

32. *nature's livery, or fortune's star*; "a blemish they were born with, or one wrought by mischance"—*Herford*, i.e. by the influence of some evil star (I. 2. 141).

34. *may undergo*, is capable of.

35. *the general censure*; not 'public opinion,' but 'the whole estimate formed of a man'; "general" being contrasted with "particular."

35, 36. *take corruption From*, be spoilt by, i.e. get discredit through. Hamlet does not say that the bad element (like leaven) will usually corrupt and pervert all the good element: he means throughout (17—38) that the "defect" will cause a man to lose the credit really due to him for his good qualities. Note how many words imply 'credit' or 'discredit,' 'good reputation' or 'scandal.'

36—38. *the dram of eale* etc. Hamlet, summing up, says: 'A man's virtues, however eminent, will not avail, as regards reputation, against some "one defect" in him, whether it be a natural or an acquired blemish; the world will judge him, not by his many virtues but by his "one defect": thus the small admixture of evil degrades the whole body of good to the level of its own disgrace.' There is some corruption of text. Probably *eale* stands for *e'il*=*evil*, just as *deale* stands for *de'il*=*devil* in the Quarto's reading at II. 2. 577, while some verb to which *doth* is the auxiliary has been perverted into *of a doubt*. See p. 227.

40. *a spirit of health*; commonly interpreted 'a healed or saved spirit.' Perhaps 'a beneficent spirit.'

43. *questionable*, that provokes questions.

47. *canonized*, sainted, consecrated; from *canonize*= 'to place in the canon,' i.e. the list of saints acknowledged by the Church. Shakespeare always accents *canónize*; cf. *King John*, III. 1. 177, "Canonized and worshipp'd as a saint." *hearsed*, encoffined; see G.

49. *inurn'd*, entombed. Elizabethan writers often use *urn*= 'grave,' from the classical custom of cremation.

52. *steel*. "Probably Sh. introduced the Ghost in armour for the sake of greater solemnity; though it was really the custom of the Danish kings to be buried in that manner." (F.)

*complete*. In Shakespeare and Milton words like *obsécure*, *extrême*, *complète*, throw the accent on to the previous syllable when they are



followed immediately by an accented syllable, e.g. a monosyllable like *steel*. So in *Comus*, 421, "She that has that is clad *in complete steel*."

54. *we*; either *we* is an irregularity for *us* or it is the subject of some verb intended to be supplied from the context, e.g. *are made*. Either way, it is an instance of what we get so often in Shakespeare, viz. irregularity of syntax reflecting the speaker's agitation.

*fools of nature*; perhaps 'victims of our weak mortal natures'; or 'the sport of Nature, who deals with us as she pleases.'

55. *disposition*, mood.

65. *fee*, value.

69—78. Compare the scene in *King Lear* (IV. 6), where the blind Gloucester wishes to throw himself from what he supposes to be Dover Cliff, especially 11—24. Probably the lack of scenery (i.e. of appeal to the eye) on the Elizabethan stage had something to do with the introduction of long passages of description, such as that in *Lear*.

71. *beetles o'er*, projects over; see G.

73. *deprive your sovereignty of reason*, take away your command over your reason.

75. *toys of desperation*, desperate freaks, mad impulses.

83. *hardy*=F. *hardi*, 'bold, stout.' *the Nemean lion*; the killing of which was the first of the labours of Hercules. *nerve*, sinew, muscle (= Lat. *nervus*).

85. *lets*, hinders; see G.

### | Scene 5. |

6. *bound*, ready; as in *King Lear*, III. 7. 11. In the next line the word is understood in the sense 'under an obligation to.' The two meanings belong respectively to quite separate words.

10. *walk*; the regular word for the nocturnal roaming of spirits.

11. *to fast*. Editors show that starvation was thought to be one of the tortures in hell. Dante has the idea.

17. *spheres*; used by Shakespeare of the orbits of the stars.

19. *an*; a variant form of *on*.

20. *porpentine*; so the original editions, and it was a recognised form of *porcupine* in Elizabethan E. See G.

21. *eternal blazon*; literally 'blazon of eternity'—that is, 'revelation of eternity, disclosure of the mysteries of eternity.' The form of phrase is thoroughly Shakespearian; cf. III. 1. 67. O.F. *blason*, 'a shield.'



27. *in the best*, at best.

32. *shouldst*, wouldst have to be.

33. *Lethe wharf*; "the banks of the infernal river Lethe [Gr. λήθη, 'a forgetting'] which produced oblivion in those who drank of it, and hence (as Shakespeare feigns) 'dulness' in the 'fat weeds' it fed"—*Herford*. Some think that the reference is to the asphodel fabled to cover the meadows of the nether regions of classical mythology.

35. *orchard*, garden; cf. III. 2. 247 ("i' the garden"), and see G.

37. *a forged process*, a fabricated account. *process*; story, narrative. Cf. the French phrase *procès-verbal*=an official report of some act or proceedings.

38. *abused*, deceived; see G.

40. *O my prophetic soul!* Cf. I. 2. 255—257.

50. *decline*, fall to a lower level.

61. *secure*, careless, free from suspicion; see G.

62. *hebenon*; variously taken to mean (1) yew, (2) ebony, (3) henbane; probably yew. The yew-tree was regarded as poisonous; and there is reason to think that the Elizabethans, whose learning in the matter of trees was not great, sometimes applied the name *heben* (=Lat. *hebenus*, 'the ebony-tree') to the yew-tree (the bark of which is dark like ebony).

63. Poisoning through the ears is mentioned in Marlowe's *Edward II.* v. 4, as an Italian method. Perhaps Shakespeare chose this method because, in III. 2, Hamlet represents the story of Gonzago as of Italian origin. In the old Hamlet-legend Hamlet's father is slain at a banquet. See *Shakespeare's England*, I. 509.

64. *leperous*, that causes leprosy; cf. "lazar-like" (72). To the Elizabethans a description of leprosy would mean much more than it does to us, the disease being then comparatively common in England.

68, 69. *posset*, curdle, make to form into clots. A *posset* was "a drink composed of hot milk curdled by some infusion, as wine or other liquor, formerly much in favour both as a luxury and as medicine." *eager*, bitter, acid; cf. I. 4. 2.

70. *thin*; opposed to the idea of 'curdled' (69). *wholesome*, sound, healthy; as in III. 2. 246, III. 4. 65.

71, 72. *tetter*, a scurf. *lazar-like*; see *lazar* in G.

75. *dispatch'd*, deprived; an extension of the common use of *dispatch*= 'to get rid of, make away with, kill.'

76. Cf. III. 3. 80—86; also what Hamlet says as to "readiness," V. 2. 208—212.



77. *Unhousel'd...unaneled*, without having received the Eucharist and extreme unction; the latter being one of the rites which were discontinued in the Church of England after the Reformation. See *anele* and *housel* in G. "Howselyng people" was a term for 'communicants.'

*disappointed*; literally 'unappointed, not equipped,' and so 'unprepared,' i.e. by repentance and confession. Cf. Johnson's note: "a man well furnished with things necessary for any enterprise is said to be well *appointed*." It is the solemn thought of "preparation" which runs through Henry's speech to the soldiers on the night before Agincourt (*Henry V.* IV. 1).

The form of the line recalls Milton's favourite arrangement of words, expressing emphasis; as in *Paradise Lost*, II. 185, "Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified. 83. *luxury*, lust; see G.

89, 90. *glow-worm*; popularly regarded as a worm, but really "the wingless female of a species of beetle." (*Shakespeare's England*, I. 494.) *matin*; there seems to be no other instance of this noun-use = F. *matin*. *uneffectual*, i.e. that looks dim and feeble as the morning dawns.

93. *Hold*, i.e. hold together—not "break" (I. 2. 158) in pieces.

94, 95. Presumably, Hamlet has been kneeling, and here rises.

97. *this...globe*, i.e. his head, which he clasps.

98—100. *table*, tablet; cf. 107. *fond*, foolish; see G. *saws*, sayings, maxims; cf. "Full of wise saws and modern instances," *As You Like It*, II. 7. 156. *pressures*, impressions.

107. *tables*; a common name for a memorandum-book made of tablets of slate or ivory. Hamlet speaks like a student.

The levity of Hamlet's bearing, from this point to the end of the scene, represents the necessary escape from the first impression of otherwise insupportable horror.

110. *there you are*, i.e. "set down" in Hamlet's note-book, because the note entered there (107—109) applies to him. *word*, watchword.

116. *Hillo, ho, ho...come*; said to have been the falconer's cry in calling his hawk down from its flight.

123. *There's ne'er a villain* etc.; i.e. 'like the King.'

127. *without more circumstance*, to cut the matter short.

136. *by Saint Patrick*. "In connection with 'the offence' there is special propriety in the oath. It was given out that a serpent stung Hamlet's father; the serpent now wears his crown. St Patrick was the proper saint to take cognisance of such an offence, having banished serpents from Ireland. In *Richard II.* II. 1. 157, Shakespeare alludes to the freedom of Ireland from venomous creatures"—*Dowden*.



Some think that St Patrick is referred to simply as a "Keeper of Purgatory" (the "prison-house" of the Ghost in his present state, 11—22). "St Patrick's Purgatory" was a famous shrine in Donegal.

147, 148. The handle of a sword with the blade forms the shape of a cross and sometimes had "Jesus" inscribed on it: hence the origin of this once common method, not peculiar to the northern nations, of administering an oath. Some explain it as a Christian adaptation of the pagan custom of swearing "by the *edge* of a sword."

150. *true-penny*; a colloquial term = 'honest fellow.' Editors note that *Truepenny* is the name of a character in more than one Elizabethan play, e.g. in the old comedy *Ralph Roister Doister*.

151. *you hear*. But do they? The Queen does not in III. 4, though the audience must. The introduction of the supernatural cannot but involve these superficial inconsistencies.

156. *Hic et ubique*? The words are spoken to the Ghost, not as if to himself; see I. I. 42, note.

163. *pioner*, digger, miner; so in *Henry V.* III. 2. 92. Elizabethans often have *er* as a suffix, equivalent to the modern *eer*; cf. "enginer," III. 4. 206. *remove*; "shift our ground."

165. *give it welcome*; 'do not refuse to *entertain* it' would be some equivalent for the quibble on *strange* and *stranger*.

167. *in your philosophy*. Hamlet knows Horatio's cool, sceptical nature; or *your* may mean 'philosophy in general' (said contemptuously); cf. *your* in III. 2. 3.

172. Why does Hamlet feign madness?

174. *encumber'd*, folded.

177. *There be*, i.e. persons who *could* explain matters.

189, 190. We must remember all through *Hamlet* that the duty of "blood-revenge" was "one of the strongest links of the family in archaic Teutonic society." The Northern sagas are full of this motive.

## ACT II.

### Scene 1.

7. *Inquire me*; the so-called ethic dative = 'for me,' 'I beg you'; as in "Villain, I say, knock me at this gate," *The Taming of the Shrew*, I. 2. 11. See V. 2. 255.

Polonius's spying on Laertes illustrates his love of tortuous, under-hand methods, and prepares us for his dealings with Hamlet.



*Danskers*, Danes. *Danske* = 'Denmark' is not uncommon in Elizabethan writers. The University of Paris was a common resort of Danes.

8. *keep*, lodge, reside; at the Universities a student is always said 'to keep' in a part of the college, i.e. have his rooms there.

10. *encompassment*; 'talking round' a subject; from the verb *encompass* in the sense 'to go all round, make a circuit about.'

*drift of question*, indirect method of enquiry; a roundabout way of finding out what you want to know.

Each phrase expresses what we colloquially term 'beating about the bush,' in a crafty manner.

11. *more nearer*. Double comparatives and superlatives, to give emphasis, are frequent in Shakespeare.

19, 20. *put on him* etc., charge him with any imaginary faults you please.

25. *fencing*; in which Laertes, as we shall see and as Polonius probably knew, was thought to excel.

26. *quaintly*, artfully; see G.

29. *unreclaimed*, untame; like a wild animal or bird.

30. *Of general assault*, such as most young men are liable to.

33. *a fetch of warrant*, a device that may be warranted to succeed; cf. old phrases like 'fetches of policy' = political stratagems, 'fetches of law,' etc.

36. The short line, like 56, suggests some gesture of emphasis; e.g. button-holing after the manner of the bore.

38. *prenominate*, afore-mentioned.

40. *in this consequence*, to this effect, on this wise. Polonius, like Osric later, serves to caricature the affectations of court-diction.

42. *addition*, title, as in I. 4. 20; see G.

53. *o'ertook in 's rouse*, overcome 'in his cups, the worse for liquor. *rouse*; cf. I. 2. 127.

57. *carp*; typical of something foolish and easy to catch.

58. *reach*, ability, power of contrivance.

59. *windlasses*, circuitous courses, literally 'windings, turnings'; a figurative use of *windlass* = 'a machine with a turning axis.'

*assays of bias*. A metaphor from bowls. The *bias* (F. *biais*, 'sloping') is the leaden weight inserted in the side of the bowl which makes it run in a *curved* line, so that the player cannot aim direct at the ball he has to hit (called "the Jack"), but has to allow for the effect of the *bias*. Hence *assays of bias* = 'indirect efforts'; "attempts



in which, instead of going straight to the object, we seek to reach it by a curved or winding course." (F.)

Bowls was a favourite Elizabethan game and its terms are often introduced figuratively as here. Cf. *Richard II.* III. 4. 3—5.

60. *indirections*, indirect means. *directions*, the things we are aiming at. The sort of word-play in the line is of a piece with Polonius's facetiousness elsewhere (e.g. in II. 2. 90—99).

65. *in yourself*, personally, with personal observation, implying 'and keep your own counsel.'

71. *closet*, small private room.

72. *doublet*; the ordinary Elizabethan name for a jacket. Literally a 'double,' i.e. inner garment, as compared with the overcoat or outer garment. Shakespeare makes his characters (e.g. Julius Cæsar) wear "doublets," whatever their period or country. *unbraced*, unfastened.

74. *down-gyved*, "fallen down to the ancle, after the fashion of gyves, or fetters." (F.)

77, 78. A touch of verbal 'irony,' coming after the scenes with the Ghost. Cf. indeed the Ghost's own words, I. 5. 13—20.

85. *As*, as if.

96, 97. *ecstasy*, madness. *property*, character, nature; cf. "proper to" = natural to. *fordoes*, destroys; see G.

106. *quoted*, noted, observed. O.F. *coter*, Lat. *quotare*, 'to note the price of'; from Lat. *quotus*, 'how much?'

107. *jealousy*, suspicion.

109. *To cast beyond ourselves*, to overreach ourselves.

112, 113. i.e. it will annoy Claudius to hear of Hamlet's love of Ophelia, but still more trouble would be caused if it were kept from him. No doubt Polonius means that trouble might ensue to himself; cf. II. 2. 129—139, where he is at such pains to disclaim connivance. The rhyme (together with the antithesis) accounts here, as often, for a certain obscurity of expression.

*hate to utter love*, i.e. vexation of Claudius at my (Polonius's) telling him of Hamlet's love.

## Scene 2.

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern recall the Salanio and Salarino of *The Merchant of Venice*. It is a law of their existence for such personages to hunt in couples. Each seeks to compensate for an entire lack of individuality by an alliance with the other. Together they bow



themselves in and out, they bandy tittle-tattle and compliments, they smirk and wheedle, and fetch and carry in general. They are the indispensable quidnuncs and hangers-on of the polite world"—*Boas*.

2. *Moreover*; treated as a conjunction. The King is always at great pains to make himself pleasant to his subjects.

6. *Sith*, since, because. In line 12 *sith* is adverbial = 'since then.'

7. *should*, can; emphatic.

12. Hamlet's bearing to them, to Horatio and the Players, gives us glimpses of his former self and tastes—what he was before his father's death.

15. *To draw him on to pleasures*; such as the Play-scene. Claudius lays the trap (II. 2. 582) for himself. He probably knows Hamlet's partiality for the drama.

22. *gentry*, courtesy.

38. *practices*. Guildenstern means 'doings, proceedings,' but it was an unfortunate word to use; cf. IV. 7. 67.

42. *still*, ever, always.

47. *Hunts not the trail* etc., is not as sure in pursuit of its schemes.

52. *the fruit*, the dessert or "banquet" (as the Elizabethans said).

56. *the main*, the central point, the chief cause.

58. *him*, Polonius.

61—68. Cf. I. 2. 17—38.

61. *Upon our first*, at our first representation; no sooner had they put the matter before him than, etc.

63. *the Polack*; see I. 1. 63, note.

67. *borne in hand*, deceived; a common Elizabethan phrase.

67, 68. *arrests On*, i.e. a summons to desist and return.

71. *give the assay*, make trial of.

79. *On such regards*, on such terms as may safely be granted.

80. *likes*, pleases; the old use.

86—105. Another and fuller (as in the presence of royalty itself) sample of his courtly circumlocutions and love of "foolish figures." The humour is that the King and Queen are "longing to hear" what the prosy old man has to tell (50—58).

86. *to expostulate*; to argue about, discourse upon.

87. *should be*, is (emphatic), i.e. how we ought to define it.

90. *wit*; the word had formerly a much wider scope than it retains, and comprised e.g. 'understanding' (as here?), 'wisdom,' 'knowledge.' It is a favourite and comprehensive word in Pope and the "Augustan" writers of the 18th century.



96—99. Spoken with extreme self-complacency. The part of Polonius is essentially one of the popular things in representations of *Hamlet*.

103. *For this effect* etc. ; for this result (Hamlet's madness) *has* some cause, i.e. is not due to mere accident. Polonius harps on his "cause" (49, 101, 102).

105. *Perpend*, reflect, consider ; an affected word.

108. *this*, i.e. a poem Ophelia had received from Hamlet before Polonius bade her "repel his letters" (II. I. 103).

111. "*beautified*"; perhaps Polonius objects to it as only an affected, loverlike variation on *beautiful*. Editors show that it occurs in the dedication to some great lady of more than one Elizabethan poem. Likely enough Shakespeare was satirising the usage.

118. *Doubt truth* etc. ; in this line *doubt* = 'suspect.'

120. *numbers*, verse, poetry (Lat. *numeri*). Cf. Pope's line, "I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came."

121. *reckon* ; suggested by "numbers."

124. *machine*, body ; said a little contemptuously, almost in the spirit of I. 2. 129, 130.

130. Polonius may fairly claim to be "faithful," according to his lights ; but "honourable" is another story : we see him play the spy on his son no less than on his prince.

131. *might* ; cf. I. I. 56. Always emphatic.

136. *play'd the desk or table-book*, served as a medium of communication between the lovers, e.g. by receiving and handing on the letters of each to the other and thus making himself as useful as some receptacle, such as a desk or a memorandum-book, in which they might otherwise have agreed to deposit and look for their correspondence.

137. i.e. given my heart a wink as a hint to keep silent.

138. *idle*, indifferent, careless.

139. *round*, in a plain-spoken manner ; cf. III. I. 183.

140. *my young mistress* ; indicating a touch of sternness in his warning to Ophelia. The same idea is conveyed by "bespeak," where the prefix often carries with it the sense of reproof.

141. *out of thy star*, above your sphere. *star* = 'fortune,' which was supposed to be determined by the influence of the stars ; cf. I. 4. 32. Cf. *Twelfth Night*, II. 5. 155—157, where the Lady Olivia, in the forged letter wooing her steward Malvolio, is made to say : "In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness." Shakespeare's fullest treatment of astrology is the passage on the "late eclipses" in *King*



*Lear*, I. 2. 112—149, a play in which “the dotages of astrology are severely ridiculed.” Shakespeare’s own teaching on this subject may be summed up in the sayings ‘man is his own star’—‘character is destiny.’

142. *prescripts*, orders.

149. *lightness*; cf. ‘light-headed.’ *declension*, fall, deterioration.

159. *the centre*, i.e. of the earth; a common use. Sometimes the Elizabethans use *centre*=‘the earth’ itself, as being the supposed centre of the universe, in the Ptolemaic astronomy, then accepted.

160. *four*; used indefinitely, like *forty*; see V. 1. 262. “*For hours*” is one of those obvious and quite needless changes.

163, 164. *arras*; see G. *encounter*, meeting.

170. *board*, accost; for the metaphor cf. IV. 6. 17.

*presently*, at once; cf. 569.

174. *you are a fishmonger*. The remark covers some colloquial and coarse allusion which reflects on Ophelia. Coleridge interprets, ‘you are sent to fish out this secret,’ but this meaning would only be possible with *fisherman*, not *fishmonger*.

181, 182. *For if the sun* etc. Honesty may well be scarce in a world which is so corrupt that the very sun produces things foul and offensive.

*a good kissing carrion*, i.e. ‘a carrion good for kissing’ (verbal noun), i.e. good for the sun to breed maggots from by his kisses. The emendation *god* for *good* is hardly a necessary change, though it does bring out finely Hamlet’s idea that the corruption of this world is so great as to pervert even divine influences. (F.)

194. *the satirical rogue*; meaning possibly Lyly (if anyone at all). Some say Juvenal (the description of old age, *Sat.* X.).

196. *amber*, resin.

199, 200. *not honesty*, not decent.

‘All this’ (says Hamlet) ‘is very true, but really it should not be printed, for decency’s sake: why, look how it applies to *you*!’

It is a clever bit of stage “business” that Polonius is made unconsciously to point the application by stepping backward.

206. *pregnant*, full of matter, significance; the metaphor in 208.

224. *indifferent*, average; those who rub along fairly well—“in the middle” of Fortune’s favours (229).

239. *confines*, prisons, places of confinement.

242—244. An idea expressed strikingly in the *Essays* (1580) of the French writer Montaigne, which had a great influence on Elizabethan thought and probably contributed something to Shakespeare’s picture



of Hamlet's character on its speculative side. S.'s familiarity with the *Essays* is seen in *The Tempest*, II. 1. 147—164.

250, 251. *the very substance of the ambitious* etc.; what the ambitious man succeeds in doing or acquiring is but a shadow of what he would like to.

255, 256. *Then are our beggars bodies* etc. Our monarchs and puffed-up celebrities are "shadows" because they embody, as it were, the ambitions of life, and ambition itself is but a sort of shadow. Beggars must be "bodies" (the opposite of "shadows") because they are the opposite, in the social scale, of monarchs and heroes. But "bodies" cast "shadows," and so your monarch (=shadowy ambition) may be called the shadow of your beggar (=the body or substance).

His companions have started this tiresome quibbling. Hamlet reduces it to an absurdity, and impatiently passes on with the remark that if they want any more "reasoning" of that kind, they must adjourn "to the court," where such stuff passed for cleverness.

261, 262. *in the beaten way of friendship*, to speak frankly as one friend to another. Something in the manner of one of them has excited the sudden suspicion in him.

272. *colour*, give a specious appearance to; cf. III. 1. 45. Shakespeare often uses the noun in the sense 'specious pretence, appearance of right'; compare the similar uses of Lat. *color* and *colorare*.

276. *consonancy*, accord, harmony; cf. Claudius's words, 11, 12.

278, 279. i.e. by any stronger motive (or tie) that a more skilful speaker could appeal to you by.

279. *be even and direct*, be honest and straightforward.

284. *we were sent for*. After this admission Hamlet's manner to them changes: "gentlemen" (354) is ironical and bitter.

286. *prevent*, anticipate, forestall; cf. *Psalm* cxix. 148, "Mine eyes prevent the watches." Lat. *prævenire*, 'to come before.'

290—298. For this wonderful specimen of Shakespeare's prose see some remarks at the end of the volume.

290. *frame*, structure; cf. *Macbeth*, III. 2. 16, "the frame of things" = the whole fabric of the universe, the heavens and the earth. It is a favourite word with Milton, as in *Paradise Lost*, VIII. 15, 16:

"When I behold *this goodly frame*, this World,  
Of Heaven and Earth consisting."

Compare the Lucretian (v. 96) phrase, *moles et machina mundi*.

290, 291. *a sterile promontory*; compare Macbeth's description of our present life as "this bank and shoal of time" (I. 7. 6), i.e. an



isthmus washed by the tides of the two Eternities, the Past and the Future.

292. *brave*, fine, glorious. *fretted*, decorated; see G.

296. *express*, well-framed or modelled; Lat. *expressus*, the p. p. of *exprimere*, 'to model, portray.'

306. *lenten*, meagre as fare in Lent ('the spring time,' Germ. *lenz*).

307. *coted*, overtook and passed; see G.

309—315. *the king...the knight* etc.; all familiar dramatic types of character, several of them represented in *Hamlet*. One can imagine the ironical note in "he that plays the *king*" etc.

311. *target*, a small shield commonly studded with nails, a targe.

312. *the humorous man*. "Not the funny man, or jester,—he was termed 'the clown,'—but the actor who personated the fantastic characters, known in Shakespeare's time as 'humourists,' and who, for the most part, were represented as capricious and quarrelsome"—and therefore not likely to "end in peace." (F.) Compare Jaques in *As You Like It*.

313. *tickle o' the sere*, easily moved, i.e. to laughter. The metaphor is from a musket that goes off with very slight pressure on the trigger or even with a sudden jar. The *sere* or *sear* is "the pivoted piece in a gun-lock which enters the notches of the tumbler and holds the hammer at full or half-cock"; O.F. *serre*, Lat. *sera*, 'a bar.' We sometimes get the phrase "*light o' the sere*," with the same sense 'unstable, easily moved.' For the lungs regarded as the seat of laughter cf. *As You Like It*, II. 7. 30, "My lungs began to crow like chanticleer."

314, 315. *the lady*; see 407—411, note. *freely*, i.e. not *very* accurately. No doubt, boy-actors often did not know their parts perfectly.

315—347. *What players are they?* This piece of *Hamlet* is, I should say, *the* most elaborate and interesting allusion in Shakespeare to circumstances of his own time. See pp. 229, 230.

318. *travel*; cf. the phrases 'to be on tour in the provinces'; '*strolling* players.' *residence*, being permanently settled in the capital.

320. *inhibition*; not an official prohibition of their acting, but a loss of public favour and support, in consequence of the popularity of the boy-actors, which had been as fatal to them as any "inhibition." A strong word is designedly used, to explain the extreme measure which the men-actors—"the tragedians of the city"—have taken in leaving the capital.

327. *eyrie...eyases*; see G. All nestlings "cry out" for their food. A very contemptuous simile.



328. *cry out on the top of question*; "declaim with their shrill treble louder than the topic in hand requires"—*Herford*. The main allusion is to the shrill voices of the boy-actors. *question* = 'subject, matter under discussion.' The boy-actors (see *Shakespeare's England*, II. 244—247) are obliged to force their voices so as to make themselves heard in a large building, and are apt to over-act and over-emphasise.

328, 329. *tyrannically*, vehemently; they receive outrageous, extravagant applause. Probably a reference to the fact that in the pre-Shakespearian plays the "tyrant's" was a noisy, melodramatic part—as we see from the description in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, I. 2. 31—42. (F.) See the notes on III. 2. 9—13.

330. *berattle*, abuse, decry. There was a considerable amount of contemporary satire and even personal ridicule and caricature on the Elizabethan stage: hence Hamlet's warning (505, 506).

331, 332. *many wearing rapiers*, i.e. gallants, who find that the sword is less mighty than the pen.

Young men of mode are afraid to visit the "common" (i.e. public) play-houses because they have become unfashionable through the ridicule poured on them in the pieces written for the boy-actors (a private company)—*Dowden*.

334. *escoted*, paid, maintained; see G. *quality*; a regular Elizabethan word for 'profession,' especially the actor's profession. Chettle describes (1592) Shakespeare as "excellent in the quality he professes," i.e. a good actor.

338, 339. *exclaim against their own succession*, cry out against what they themselves are destined to be, i.e. "common players."

341. *tarre*, incite, set on (like dogs); in *King John*, IV. I. 117.

342. *there was...no money bid for argument*; commonly interpreted: 'no money was offered by theatrical managers (e.g. Henslowe) for any plot of a play—any dramatic subject (= Lat. *argumentum*)—unless this controversy between the poets (representing the "children") and the "common players" were introduced into it.'

346. *carry it away*, win the day. *it*; the indefinite object easily supplied from the context.

347. *Hercules and his load too*. An allusion to the Globe Theatre (see p. 230) on the Bankside, the sign of which was a figure of Hercules bearing the world like Atlas. Rosencrantz's reply that the "children" have not only "carried" the day but carried off the sign of the theatre is a humorous way of saying that they have won all along the line.

349. *make mows at*; cf. *The Tempest*, II. 2. 9. The noun *mow*,



'a grimace,' is from F. *moue* (a word of Dutch origin), 'a pouting, a wry face'; so that 'to mow at' is like F. *faire la moue à*.

351. *in little*, i.e. in miniature. Probably these courtiers are wearing the pictures: hence Hamlet's remark.

'*Sblood*'; one of the oaths in which 's represents *God's* (i.e. Christ's)—cf. '*swounds* (553), '*sdeath*—while *blood* refers to the Eucharist.

A statute was passed in the reign of James I. (1605) forbidding profanity on the stage. The editors of the 1st Folio (1623) observed this statute either by omitting an objectionable phrase, or by making some slight change, e.g. substituting *Heaven* or *Jove* for *God*.

356. *let me comply with you in this garb*, let me show you ceremony (or formal politeness) in this manner (i.e. by shaking hands). His tone is ironical, and purposely affected; he regards them now as mere hirelings of the King.

357. *extent*; literally, 'the action of extending'; hence, 'the showing or exercising of some quality,' e.g. justice, politeness and kindness (as here).

359. *uncle-father...aunt-mother*; perhaps the best of comments on I. 2. 65.

362. *mad north-north-west*; "just touched with madness"—*Hcrford*; even as the wind thus described has not *very* much west in it. But Hamlet's next words point also to the meaning, 'I am only mad when the wind blows from that quarter.' There was an old medical notion as to the respective influences of the winds on insane people.

363. *I know a hawk from a handsaw*; apparently, the saying was or became proverbial. *handsaw*; 'a heron'; see G; the form *hanser* is still used in East Anglia.

The whole remark is explained thus: a bird when roused—especially a bird heavy on the wing, like the heron—usually flies with the wind: the wind being in the southern quarter, the heron would fly northwards, i.e. away from the sun: the eyes of the falconer, as they followed the flight of the heron and the pursuing hawk, would not be dazzled by the sun, and so would be able, though not easily, to distinguish the one from the other. It is said that a heron will seek to elude pursuit by mounting direct towards the sun. Heron-hawking was one of the favourite varieties of Elizabethan falconry. (F.)

Hamlet means to let Rosencrantz and Guildenstern know that he sees through them: 'I am not so mad as not to know knaves like you.'

368. *Happily*; cf. I. I. 134.

375. *Roscius*; the most celebrated comic actor at Rome; died



62 B.C. From his signal eminence in his profession the name Roscius came to be a synonym for a great actor.

377. *Buz, buz!* a colloquial interjection to cut a person short when he begins telling stale news. (F.)

379. *Then came each actor* etc.; adapted from some ballad.

380—385. Probably a humorous glance by Shakespeare himself at the varied character of the English drama, and at the combination in one play of elements which in the classical drama were kept distinct. Thus classical drama furnishes no parallels to “tragi-comedies” like *The Merchant of Venice*.

383. Most interpret *scene indivisible* = ‘a play in which the unity of place is preserved,’ and *poem unlimited* = ‘one in which the unities of place and time are not preserved.’ See p. 231.

383, 384. *Seneca*; the Latin dramatist of the Silver Age.

*Plautus*. The *Comedy of Errors* is based on the *Menæchmi* of Plautus, translated into English in 1595.

384, 385. *the law of writ and the liberty*, i.e. plays of the strict classical type, which observe the principles enumerated above, and plays of the free romantic type. *writ* = *writing*.

386—401. The quotations are from an old ballad—*Jephtha Judge of Israel*—given in Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.

402. *the first row of the pious chanson*. This is the reading of the 2nd Quarto, and it is exactly equivalent in sense to “the first *verse* of me [*sic*] godly *Ballet*” (i.e. ballad), which is the reading of the 1st Quarto.

403. *my abridgment*, those who cut short my remarks (and thus prevent him “showing more” to Polonius).

406. *valanced*, fringed with a “beard”; see G.

407—411. The humour lies in the fact that the “young lady” is a boy. Women were not allowed to act in public in Shakespeare’s time; see p. 232. The boy-actor has grown since he was last at Elsinore, but Hamlet humorously accounts for the change by supposing that “her ladyship” has adopted the fashionable high-soled shoe. The reference to the *chopine* (see G.) is obviously a touch of Elizabethan satire.

410, 411. *cracked within the ring*. “There was a ring on the coin, within which the sovereign’s head was placed; if the crack extended from the edge beyond this ring, the coin was rendered unfit for currency. Such pieces were hoarded by the usurers of the time and lent out as lawful money.” (F.)

There is, of course, a quibble on *ring* of the voice.

412. *like French falconers*. The modern French sportsman is



popularly supposed not to disdain the humblest contribution ("anything") to his "bag." For the same reason "it was the fashion of our ancestors to sneer at the French as falconers"—*Madden*.

418, 419. *caviare to the general*, unappreciated by the multitude. See *caviare* in G.

420. *cried in the top of mine*, echoed mine to the full.

421. *digested*, arranged, ordered.

422. *modesty*, moderation, freedom from exaggeration of any kind.

423. *sallets*, relishes, piquant ingredients; implying 'ribaldry.'

425. *affection*, affectation of style, such as the euphuism ridiculed in *Love's Labour's Lost*; one of the chief features of it was excessive alliteration—what they called "hunting the letter."

*honest*, in its once common sense 'not wanton.'

426. *more handsome than fine*; the distinction between real beauty (or grace) and mere showiness.

427. *Æneas' tale to Dido*, i.e. the story of the Fall of Troy, told in Vergil's *Æneid* II., and introduced in a play which Shakespeare undoubtedly had in his mind's eye, viz. *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, the work of Marlowe and Nash, published 1594. There (II. 1), as here, the slaughter of Priam by Pyrrhus is told in a speech which is so like the speech in *Hamlet* (433—498) that the one must certainly have recalled the other to an Elizabethan audience. Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, in which Æneas is a chief character on the Trojan side, is concerned entirely with episodes in the siege of Troy.

433—498. As regards the very remarkable style of the speech, some hold that Hamlet's commendation is ironical and that Shakespeare is burlesquing the style of *Dido* and of the stilted type of tragedies, such as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. But lines 464—468 hardly sound like burlesque.

Others deny this intention of parody and explain the bombast "as a deliberate attempt to distinguish the language of the play within the play from the dignified poetry of the play itself."

431. *the Hyrcanian beast*, the tiger. "*Hyrcania*, a province of the ancient Persian Empire, on the S. and S.E. shores of the Caspian or Hyrcanian Sea"—*Classical Dict.*; famous as a breeding-place of tigers, hence proverbial, like Scythia, of all that is barbarous and savage. Cf. *Dido*, v. 1. 158, 159:

"But thou art sprung from Scythian Caucasus,

And tigers of Hyrcania gave thee suck."

433. *sable*; the heraldic word for 'black.'



435. *the ominous horse*; the famous Trojan horse, *Æneid* II.
436. *complexion*, the whole appearance of his "sable" armour.
438. *total gules*, red with blood from head to foot. *gules*; the heraldic word for 'red' (literally 'red as the throat,' Lat. *gula*). *trick'd*, decked; this also is a term in heraldry = 'blazoned.'
441. *tyrannous*; with the same idea of 'outrageous,' as in 328
443. *o'er-sized*, covered as with size (a sort of glue). *coagulate*, Lat. *coagulatus*, 'curdled.'
444. Cf. *Julius Cæsar*, I. 2. 186, "*ferret* and fiery eyes," i.e. *red* like a ferret's, and angry. This peculiarity (seen in beasts and birds of prey, e.g. the owl) shows strong passion. Scott speaks of an imprisoned eagle's eyes "*flashing red lightning*" (*Kenilworth*, xxii.).
450. Shakespeare always accents *antique*. See v. 2. 329.
- 454, 455. A clear reminiscence of *Dido*, II. 1, where Priam is described as assailing Pyrrhus:
- "Which he disdain, whistled his sword about,  
And with the wind thereof the king fell down."  
*unnerved*, weak. *father*, old man.
- 455, 456. *senseless*; without sense, i.e. feeling, yet apparently able to feel *this* blow. *Ilium*, Priam's palace.
458. *Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear*, i.e. stupefies him for the moment with its din.
459. We had *decline* = 'fall,' figuratively, in I. 5. 50.
461. *as a painted tyrant*. Editors refer to *Macbeth*, v. 8. 25—27:  
"We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,  
Painted upon a pole, and underwrit,  
'Here may you see the tyrant.'"
462. *neutral to*, a man indifferent to, not siding with either.
465. *the rack*, the mass of clouds; see G.
468. *region*, a regular Elizabethan word for 'the space of air, the sky'; cf. 556. So in *Paradise Lost*, VII. 425, "Part loosely wing the region" (said of birds).
471. *for proof eterne*, to be of everlasting durability.
- 473—475. Referring to the common representation of Fortune as a blindfold goddess turning a wheel (an emblem of mutability). The blindness is a symbol of her wayward, seemingly blind dispensation of favours.
475. A *felly* or *felloe* is part of the rim of a wheel.
480. *a jig*; much the same as what is now called a "musical sketch." Collier defines it as "a ludicrous composition in rhyme, sung



or said by the Clown, and accompanied by dancing and playing upon the pipe and tabor." See an account in *Shakespeare's England*, II. 261, 262.

482. *mobled*, muffled; see G.

Polonius praises (484) the word which Hamlet cavils at (483), by way of retaliating on Hamlet for his late sarcasm (479, 480).

486. *bisson rheum*, blinding tears; see each word in G.

491. *state*, power.

495. *clamour*, loud wailing; a common use.

497. *milch*; probably a verb = 'to flow,' literally 'to shed moisture as soft as milk or dew.'

498. *And passion*, i.e. and would have stirred ("made") emotion.

502. *bestowed*, lodged.

504. *the abstract and brief chronicles of the time*. The drama of a period is like an epitome or short history of it. The stage "holds the mirror up to nature" and so reflects all the phases and fashions of contemporary thought and life. Thus we could form from the Elizabethan drama a very good idea of the characteristics of the Elizabethan Age.

509. *whipping*; formerly the regular punishment for vagrants and "sturdy beggars"; actors, unless licensed, ranked as such by Act of Parliament (1571).

514—519. The effect of the speech on the Player himself and on Hamlet suggests to Hamlet his experiment for "catching" Claudius (582, 583); and the Players are the means of executing it. Also, the contrast drawn out in 526—548 at once "sharpens Hamlet's conscience" and throws into relief his character. Thus the introduction of the Players serves more than one dramatic purpose.

518. *study*; the regular actor's word for 'to learn by heart.'

522. *mock him not*; as the Players might be disposed to, having seen Hamlet's own treatment of Polonius. It is a kindly hint, to save them getting into trouble, through ignorance of Polonius's influence.

529, 530. *to his own conceit*, i.e. up to the level of, so as to be in harmony with, his imagination. For *conceit* = 'imagination' cf. 533,

III. 4. 113. *her*, the soul's. *wann'd*; cf. 499.

531. *aspect*; this accentuation is invariable in Shakespeare; cf. *Henry V.* III. 1. 9, "Then lend the eye a terrible aspect."

532, 533. *his whole function suiting With* etc., all his bodily powers adapting themselves to the expression of.

537. *the cue for*, the call to, the motive for. 'Call' being also a stage-term exactly reproduces *cue* (see G.) in this figurative sense.



540. *Make mad the guilty.* It is significant how this idea runs in his mind, reaching at last the conviction of the climax, "the play's the thing" (582, 583).

*appal*, i.e. with that "fear" for ourselves (viz. of falling into the same sin) which Aristotle defines as one of the great objects of Tragedy; "pity" of the sufferers and sinners being the other. *free*, i.e. from guilt; the innocent. Cf. III. 2. 230, "we that have free souls."

541. *amaze*; see I. 2. 235, note.

544. *peak*, *palter*, *sneak*; lit. 'to waste away,' like a sick face.

545. *John-a-dreams*, literally, 'John of deams,' i.e. John the dreamer; a word apparently coined by Shakespeare as "a nickname for a sleepy, apathetic fellow." Being a very common name, *John* or *Jack* occurs in many familiar compounds, e.g. *Jack-a-lanthorn*.

*unpregnant of my cause*, slow to translate my motive into action.

547. *property*; "his crown, his wife [I. 5. 75], everything in short which he might be said to be possessed of"—*Furness*. Some say 'his own person.'

548. *defeat*, destruction; literally 'undoing.' Cf. I. 2. 10.

551. i.e. calls me a liar and makes me swallow the insult.

553. 'Swounds, i.e. God's (= Christ's) wounds; commonly contracted still further to *Zounds*. Here again (cf. 351) the Folio substitutes the milder exclamation *Why*. Cf. V. 1. 267.

554. *pigeon-liver'd*; "the pigeon was supposed to secrete no gall... the physical cause of rancour, bitterness"—*Dowden*.

555. *bitter*, i.e. feel bitter to him.

556. *region*; cf. 468. The word is used as an adjective ('of the air') in *Sonnet* 33, "The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now."

558. *kindless*, unnatural; cf. I. 2. 65, note.

562. *Prompted...by...hell*, i.e. by the apparition; cf. I. 4. 40, 41.

566. *About, my brain!* set to work! i.e. on the "speech" (518).

*I have heard* etc. One of the best known cases (described in the play *A Warning for Fair Women*, 1599) was that of a woman at King's Lynn who had murdered her husband and betrayed her guilt. Ward notes that Napoleon is said to have been reminded of the murder of the Duc d'Enghien by a performance at St Cloud.

566—583. Hamlet's counter-conspiracy to the plotting of Claudius and Polonius (II. 2). The grim humour is that—till III. 1. 162—175—the King little suspects he is being beaten at his own game.

575. *tent*, probe; from the noun *tent* = a roll of linen with which to probe, i.e. try (Lat. *tentare*), a wound or sore. *blench*, flinch, start.



576—581. An old belief. Cf. Hamlet's words, I. 4. 40, 41.

576. *spirit*; a monosyllable.

580. *potent with such spirits*, i.e. potent in using as instruments of evil such spirits as Hamlet has seen (576).

581. *Abuses*, deceives. *to damn me*, i.e. by leading him to commit murder.

582. *More relative*, more definite, implying 'surer, more certain'; literally 'that have a closer relation to the matter in hand.'

*than this*, i.e. than the Ghost's revelation. Is Hamlet really in doubt as to the genuineness of the vision and his uncle's guilt?

## ACT III.

### Scene 1.

1. *drift of circumstance*, roundabout means, indirect methods. One of the main senses of *circumstance* is 'words or work made *about* anything'; hence 'beating about the bush, indirectness.'

13. *Niggard of question*. Rosencrantz's description gives an impression of their interview with Hamlet which is exactly the opposite of what really occurred.

14. *assay him To*, try to get him to join in.

17. *o'er-raught*, overtook.

24—27. A perfect piece of "tragic irony." Claudius does not know what we know (II. 2. 566—583).

26. *give him a further edge*, whet his inclination for "delights."

29. *closely*, with a pressing message.

31. *Affront*, encounter, meet face to face (Lat. *frons*).

44. *bestow*, place. *this book*; evidently a book of devotions; cf. 47 and Hamlet's address to her (89). Moreover, "exercise" (45) is a Shakespearian word for 'act of devotion, performance of religious duty'; much used also by the Puritans in that sense.

45. *colour*; cf. II. 2. 272.

52. *to*, compared to.

56. *or not to be*, i.e. to end one's life by self-destruction. Hamlet has already spoken of suicide as a means of escape (I. 2. 131, 132), and he dwells on it in a later part of this very speech (75—82), giving, however, a different reason for refraining. The notion that in the words *or not to be* he is speculating on the possibility of 'something after death'



—whether there is a future life—cannot be entertained for a moment. The whole drift of the speech shows his belief in a future life.

Curiously opposite is Macbeth's soliloquy "if it were done" etc. (I. 7. 1—12), in which the dominating thought is that if he could make sure of escaping punishment for his crime in this world he would risk the next world; yet Hamlet and Macbeth are alike in some respects.

Another famous parallel is Claudio's speech in *Measure for Measure*, III. 1. 118—132, "Ay, but to die, and go we know not where!"

Practically the whole of Hamlet's speech has become proverbial as an outpouring of utter world-weariness. Of course, much of the imagery is not peculiar to Shakespeare or any one writer, e.g. the likening of death to starting on a long journey.

58. *slings*, i.e. missiles thrown by slings.

59. *take arms against a sea of troubles*. "To take up arms and rush upon the waves of the sea was a custom attributed by several classical writers to the Celts. Shakespeare probably read of it in Fleming's translation of Ælian's *Histories* (1576), book xii., where it is said that they 'throw themselves into the fomey floudes with their swordes drawn in their handes, and shaking their javelines as though they were of force and violence to withstand the rough waves'"—*Herford*. The "troubles" are pictured as advancing like some overwhelming tide.

61. *No more*, just that, only that, i.e. falling on "sleep."

63. *consummation*; a completion of one's life, a crowning and fitting end.

65. *Rub* is the technical term in bowls (II. 1. 59, note) for any obstacle which hinders the bowl from keeping on its proper course—e.g. an uneven bit of ground, a stone. Hence the figurative sense 'difficulty,' as in this now proverbial phrase "there's the rub."

66. *what dreams*, i.e. the thought of what dreams may come.

67. *mortal coil*, turmoil of mortality, confused trouble of mortal life. Shakespeare always uses *coil* = 'turmoil'; see G. Here, however, there is probably some reference (cf. "shuffle") to a *coil* of rope, i.e. figuratively 'a chain, bonds.'

This form of phrase is very common in Shakespeare. See I. 5. 21, III. 4. 144, IV. 7. 96. The adjective is made to define the sphere or character of the noun.

68. *respect*, consideration = "regard," in 87.

69. *of so long life*, so long-lived.

70. The real speaker, one feels, is Shakespeare himself.



*time*, the times, the world, one's contemporaries; more often "*the time*" (I. 5. 189) or "*the times*."

73, 74. *office...merit*; fine examples of abstract for concrete.

75. *might his quietus make*, might give himself his release from life's troubles. See *quietus* in G.

76. *bare*, mere, only a. *bodkin*, dagger; the original sense of *bodkin*. This, like IV. 5. 67, seems to me to be a verbal reminiscence of Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* study. For Chaucer, *The Monk's Tale*, 716, and several of our old writers, e.g. Lydgate, say that Cæsar was slain with "*bodkins*," where the weapon meant is evidently a dagger (*pugio*) such as could be concealed under the *toga*. See note on III. 2. 100, 101. *fardels*, burdens; the word (cf. F. *fardeau*) suggests, and line 77 (cf. "*grunt*") completes the picture of, an overladen animal.

79. *bourn*, boundary, limit; F. *borne*.

80. Has Hamlet lost faith in the Ghost (II. 2. 576—581), or forgotten it altogether?

Marlowe's *Edward II.* (which influenced *Richard II.* considerably) has the lines (v. 6):

"Farewell, fair queen: weep not for Mortimer,  
That scorns the world, and, as a traveller,  
Goes to discover countries yet unknown."

81, 82. Cf. Claudio's sentiment (*Measure for M.* III. 1. 129—132):

"The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
Can lay on nature is a paradise  
To what we fear of death" (i.e. compared with).

83. *conscience*, speculative reflection, from the sense 'consciousness'; not 'the moral sense,' as at v. 2. 58, 67.

85. *thought*, anxiety, as in the Scriptural phrase "take no thought for your life," *Matthew* vi. 25, where the R.V. has "be not anxious."

86. *pitch and moment*, height and importance. *pitch*; a term in falconry for the highest point to which a hawk soars, and from which she swoops. The Folio has *pith* = 'value, significance.'

87, 88. *And lose the name of action*; even as a river may lose itself in a sandy waste and so after its long course never reach the sea: a wonderful symbol, indeed, of frustration and failure.

89. *orisons*, prayers; O.F. *oraison*, Lat. *oratio*. Cf. note on 44.

95—149. Why does Hamlet treat Ophelia so roughly?

99. *perfume*; perhaps a reminiscence of Laertes's words (I. 3. 9).

103. *honest*, chaste; so in 107, 110, 112.



108. *no discourse to*, no parleying with; such as his own intercourse with her.

113. *translate*, change.

114. *the time*; cf. 70. It is a conveniently vague phrase: what he really means is the King's evil influence over the Queen.

118, 119. *we shall relish of it*, we shall still retain something of the old "offending Adam." *it*, the "stock." A metaphor from grafting one fruit on another.

122. *indifferent*, tolerably.

123—129. *I could accuse me* etc. Some critics take this self-condemnation as serious, inspired by Hamlet's disgust at his slowness in carrying out his great duty; others as ironical. The irony would be vastly more effective if we could assume (as some do) that Hamlet knew he was being overheard by Claudius and Polonius.

142. *your paintings*; referring to women in general. This custom of Elizabethan ladies, with that of wearing false hair, is a constant subject of contemporary satire. Dark hair and complexion were unpopular because Elizabeth was fair.

145. *nickname God's creatures*, i.e. use foolish pet names.

145, 146. *make your wantonness* etc., i.e. excuse your wantonness on the plea of ignorance.

148. *all but one*; would Hamlet warn the King thus if he suspected him to be present?

151. *courtier, soldier, scholar*. The Elizabethan ideal of the *complete* man—that is, the man of breeding, action, and culture; a Philip Sidney or Raleigh.

152. *The expectancy and rose*, the hope, the very flower.  
*fair*, made fair by his presence.

153. *The glass of fashion* etc., the mirror of good taste and pattern of courtly grace.

158. *out of tune*; so Cordelia speaks of Lear's "untuned and jarring senses" (IV. 7. 16).

159. *unmatch'd*, unmatchable. *feature*, shape, form, general appearance; not (as now) used of the face alone. F. *faiture*, 'make,' Lat. *factura*. *blown*, in full bloom; the metaphor suggested in 152 ("rose") and continued in the next line, which recalls I. 3. 38—41.

160. *woe is me*; of course the pronoun is the dative.

162—175. Claudius shows himself far the best judge of Hamlet, and very resourceful and rapid in power of decision.

163, 164. *Nor...not*; the emphatic double negative, as in I. 2. 157.



166. *disclose*; an old word for 'hatching,' from the sense 'to open' (as in I. 3. 39). So again in V. 1. 280.

167. *for to*; an old idiom (very seldom used by Shakespeare), in which *for* is added to strengthen the notion of purpose or motive. *prevent*, forestall, anticipate.

168. *determination*. Scan the *-ion* as *i-ön*; that is, sounding the *i* instead of slurring it into the next syllable, which is stressed lightly. In Shakespeare and in Milton's early poems the termination *-ion*, especially with words ending in *-ction*, such as 'perfection,' 'distraction' is often treated as two syllables, especially at the end of a line. In Middle E. poetry the termination *-ion* was always two syllables.

172. *variable objects*, change and variety of surroundings.

173. *something-settled*; most editors hyphen the words, taking *something* adverbially = 'somewhat, in some degree.'

176—187. Polonius clings to his opinion, given so emphatically (II. 2. 146—159), and thinks it will yet be verified.

183. *grief*, grievance. *round with him*; cf. II. 2. 139 (note).

185. *find him not*, does not find out what is the matter with him.

## Scene 2.

This commentary (1—44) on the actor's art has, obviously, a personal interest: Shakespeare himself speaks and shows himself, as ever, the thorough *actor*-dramatist, with full, practical knowledge of the stage and stage-effect. "The Prince is made the mouthpiece of criticisms of which the theatrical company at the Globe had doubtless often had the benefit."

3. *your*. Shakespeare often uses *your* colloquially (cf. Latin *iste*), to indicate some person or thing known to everyone. Cf. I. 16 and IV. 3. 21, 22.

7. *temperance*, moderation, self-control. It is the essential element of what has been called the "paradox of acting," that an actor should always be conscious that he is acting, i.e. should never be so carried away by real feeling as to lose his self-consciousness and self-control.

9. *robustious*, rather 'violent, blustering' than 'vigorous.'

*Periwig* is a corruption of F. *perruque*.

The sort of contemporary melodramatic acting which Shakespeare has in mind here (9—14) may be inferred again from *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, I. 2. 30—32, where he makes Bottom say: "yet my chief humour is for a *tyrant*: I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split."

10. *the groundlings*; the Elizabethan term for "the spectators who



stood on the ground in what corresponded to the pit of a modern theatre." This central part, not roofed, was known as the "yard"; plays having been acted in the yards of inns during the period that immediately preceded the erection of regular theatres. The price of admission to the "yard" was 1*d*.

11. *capable of*, able to appreciate. *inexplicable*, unintelligible.

13. *Termagant*; a supposed deity of the Saracens. *Termagant* is often mentioned together with Mahoun (i.e. Mahomet) in old romances like *Guy of Warwick*, and introduced in the Miracle and Morality plays, where he is "represented as a most violent character," suitable to a ranting actor. The transition is not great from 'a ranting character' to 'a scolding woman' (the modern sense).

*it out-herods Herod*; who was typically "the furious and violent tyrant" of the Miracle-plays. A stage-direction in one of them runs: "Here Erode ragis in thys pagond [i.e. *pageant* or moveable scaffold] and in the strete also." Chaucer says of his parish clerk John Absolon in *The Miller's Tale*, 3384, that sometimes, "He playeth Herodes, on a scaffold hye." (F.) "Akin to Herod in the extravagance with which they were drawn and acted were Pharaoh and Pilate." In *As You Like It*, III. 4. 7—9, there is a reference to the red hair of Judas in the Miracle-plays. These references would appeal more to the older play-goers. (*Scaffold* was the technical name for the old platform-stage.)

19, 20. *modesty*, moderation; as in II. 2. 422. *from*; away from, hence 'contrary to.' Hamlet's definition of the "end" of the stage ("to hold the mirror" etc.) has been accepted universally as final.

23, 24. *the...body of the time*; as we say, 'the social body, 'society.' *his...pressure*, i.e. the impression it makes on the observer.

26. *censure*, judgment; cf. 85 and see G.

*the which one*, i.e. "the judicious" spectator, taken singly but regarded as representative of a class.

27. *in your allowance*, as you will allow, as you must agree.

32. *nature's journeymen*, i.e. not Nature herself but her hired workmen. Literally *journeyman* = 'a man who works by the day'; strictly, a journey is a day's travel (F. *journée*).

35. *indifferently*, tolerably; cf. III. 1. 122.

37—43. Some think that the satire here is specially directed against the comic actor William Kemp, who in 1602 left the company to which Shakespeare belonged and joined a rival troupe. No doubt, dramatists suffered much through the irrelevances ("gag"), mostly very hackneyed, of these "low comedy" performers. See p. 232.



46. *presently*, at once.

52. *just*, honest. Hamlet's feeling for the cool, practical Horatio illustrates the attraction of opposites. A man often values most in others the qualities he knows himself to lack. *Hamlet* is peculiarly a play of contrasts and parallels.

53. *conversation*, intercourse, experience of life. *coped*, met.

56. Shakespeare accents both *revénue*, as here, and *révenue*. For the former cf. *King John*, III. 1. 169, "This juggling witchcraft with *revénue* cherish."

58. *candied*, sugared, sweet, and so 'flattering.'

59. *And crook*; the real subject (viz. 'flatterer') is easily supplied from 58. *pregnant*; ready, prompt; see II. 2. 206, note.

60. *thrift*, gain; cf. 172.

66—69. Hamlet is describing what he knows that he himself is *not*. One of the things of pathos in *Hamlet* is the relation between Hamlet and Horatio: the man of supreme but ineffectual intellect idealising (as always) the strong, capable friend.

67, 68. *blood*, passion. For the metaphor cf. again 333—353.

70. *passion's slave*; as Hamlet feels that he himself is too often; cf. his words in III. 4. 106.

79. *in one speech*; i.e. at the "dozen or sixteen lines" (II. 2. 518).

80. *a damned ghost*; see I. 4. 40, 41, II. 2. 576—581.

82. *stithy*, smithy; 'a place of *stiths*' (anvils).

86, 87. If Claudius does give any sign, however slight or concealed, of guilt, Horatio guarantees that it shall not escape his notice.

88. *be idle*, i.e. assume his "madness" or "antic disposition" (I. 5. 172) again; cf. his first reply to Claudius.

90. *fares*; Claudius means 'is,' but Hamlet chooses to take it in the other sense 'eats.' *cousin*; cf. I. 2. 64.

91, 92. Editors show that it was one of the popular beliefs of Shakespeare's time that the chameleon, a kind of lizard, lives on air. Lit. 'a ground-lion, dwarf-lion'; Gk. χαμαι, 'on the ground' + λέων.

*promise-crammed*; alluding to the sort of "promise" implied in I. 2. 108, 109 (and also by 324, 325, of the present scene).

93, 94. *I have nothing* etc.; this is no answer; it does not apply to what I said.

96. *you played once i' the university*. See p. 233.

100, 101. *i' the Capitol*. The real scene of Cæsar's murder, which Shakespeare in *Julius Cæsar*, as here, places in the Capitol, was the *Curia Pompeiana*, adjoining the *Porticus* of Pompey's theatre. He



diverges from the true, *historical* account in Plutarch, and gives the Capitol, not this *Curia*, because of the old *literary* tradition to that effect, mentioned e.g. by Chaucer, in *The Monk's Tale*.

120, 121. If to "wear black" (i.e. mourning) means so little, Hamlet will leave it to the devil (and is not "black" the garb which tradition assigns him?). Hamlet will exchange *his* "suit of woe" (I. 2. 86) for *a suit trimmed with rich sables*. Such a suit would be the very opposite of a mourner's garb; for sables are brown (not black) fur, used as a trimming of the costliest and most brilliant (e.g. scarlet) robes of great personages.

There is a quibble on the noun *sables* ('fur') and the adj. *sable*, the heraldic word for 'black' (II. 2. 433).

125. *not thinking on*, being forgotten.

126. "*the hobby-horse is forgot*"; this occurs in *Love's Labour's Lost*, III. 1. 30, and other Elizabethan plays. The "hobby-horse" was one of the traditional characters of the old morris-dance, i.e. 'Moorish dance,' said to have been introduced into England in the reign of Edward III. by John of Gaunt on his return from Spain, and performed on festal days, especially on May-Day and at Whitsuntide (*Henry V.* II. 4. 25).

Nares describes it as "the figure of a horse fastened round the waist of a man, his own legs going through the body of the horse, and enabling him to walk, but concealed by a long foot-cloth; while false legs appeared where those of the man should be, at the sides of the horse." (F.)

The Puritans sought to suppress these revels, and it was through their influence that the "hobby-horse" came to be omitted—a fact evidently lamented in the ballad from which this refrain (126) is quoted.

*Hautboy*, a wooden instrument with a high tone; F. *hautbois*, whence the Italian form *oboè*, which gives us our form *oboe*.

*The dumb-show enters*. "The dumb-show was a relic of the Moralities, introduced in several of the earlier court dramas, and hence in keeping with the play it ushers in. Commonly, however, it merely (as in *Gorboduc*) symbolised the coming action, instead of literally rehearsing it as here....It is no doubt surprising that the king does not already rise and break off the play, or that, after being thus warned, so consummate an actor cannot control himself at the crucial moment"—*Herford*. Possibly the King and Queen are engaged in whispering confidentially to each other during the dumb-show and thus miss the



warning it conveys. Anyhow, Hamlet's device succeeds (251—256) even better than he had hoped (76—85; II. 2. 575).

*upon a bank of flowers*; cf. "i' the garden" (247); see I. 5. 59. The Elizabethan stage had simple "properties," i.e. pieces of furniture.

*pours poison*; see I. 5. 63—64. The Italians were thought expert poisoners; cf. Doctor Alasco in *Kenilworth*. *Mutes*, i.e. *mutæ personæ*; cf. V. 2. 323.

128. *micning mallecho*, skulking (or 'stealthy') mischief; see G.

130. *argument*, subject=Lat. *argumentum*; cf. the *argumenta* prefixed to Latin comedies. Cf. II. 2. 342.

*Enter Prologue*, i.e. the speaker of the prologue. Cf. a stage-direction in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, V. 106, "*Enter Quince for the Prologue*," i.e. as the speaker of it.

"The beginning of the performance was announced by three trumpet-blasts. The actor who spoke the Prologue appeared in a long [black] cloak, with a laurel-wreath on his head, probably because this duty was originally performed by the poet himself"—*Brandes*.

136. *naught*= 'naughty'; meaning 'licentious'; see G.

141. "The *poesy* or *posy* (for the two words are the same) of a ring was a motto or rhyme inscribed upon its inner side. The fashion of putting such posies on rings prevailed from the middle of the sixteenth to the close of the seventeenth centuries" (Rolfe). The posy of the ring that Nerissa gave Gratiano was "Love me, and leave me not," *The Merchant of Venice*, V. 1. 150.

143. *As woman's love*; meaning Ophelia or the Queen or both?

144. This Play-scene—an "interlude," in the strict sense—is cast in the manner of the earlier Elizabethan tragedy modelled on Seneca, and rhymed. Cf. the stilted style, the classical allusions, and the thoroughly Senecan sententiousness and moralising. Its Senecan character is its essential feature.

"The picturesque machinery of the play within a play may be noted as an Italian device which had already been used by Kyd (in *The Spanish Tragedie*) and other writers." The device is a very common one—widespread in dramatic literature.

154. *distrust*, am anxious.

156. *holds quantity*, are proportionate, the one to the other: as the love is, so is the fear. *holds*; the verb may be regarded as going separately with each noun.

157. *In neither aught*, i.e. either they ("women's fear and love") contain nothing, or what they contain is in extremes.



The strained manner is due to the exigency of rhyme.

163. *operant*, active. *leave*, cease ; cf. III. 4. 66.

171. *The instances that...move*, the motives that prompt.

172. *respects of thrift*, considerations of gain. Cf. 60.

175—184. What a reproach and stimulus to Hamlet himself !

177—204. Some think that this speech, or part of it, represents the speech ("some dozen or sixteen lines") which Hamlet was to insert in the play. This theory is based on the style of the passage : "the diction is different from the remainder of the dialogue, and is singularly like Hamlet's own argumentative mode." But note Hamlet's anxiety over the speech of Lucianus, 241—246. The latter, indeed, is only six, not sixteen, lines, but Hamlet may have written less than he intended, or the speech may be broken off by the King's sudden movement (251). (F.)

179, 180. *sticks* ; singular because the subject *which* (= "purpose") is singular. *fall* ; plural because it is the pieces of fruit ("they") that he pictures to his mind's eye. Often in Shakespeare's similes the thing compared attracts to itself the description ("sticks on the tree") that really belongs to the thing with which it is compared.

181. *Most necessary 'tis*, it is quite inevitable that.

186. *Their own enactures*, the execution of their purposes.  
*destroy* ; attracted to the plural idea "grief and joy."

188. *accident*, incident, event ; implying 'cause.'

192. *Whether* ; a monosyllable (= *wher*), as often in Shakespeare.

193. Had Shakespeare in mind the fall of the great Essex and his treatment by Bacon ? At any rate, the line had special significance in the days of political and literary "patronage."

198. *seasons him* ; perhaps 'ripens him into,' as though the test of the false friend brought his falseness to maturity ; cf. I. 3. 80. Or the metaphor may be from seasoning a dish, i.e. imparting a certain character to it.

201, 202. *still*, ever, always. *their ends*, their issues, outcome.

208. *An anchor's cheer* etc. ; "may my whole liberty and enjoyment be to live on hermit's fare in prison"—*Johnson*.

*anchor* ; the older form of *anchorite*.

209. *Each opposite* ; everything exactly contrary (or opposed) to joy. *blanks*, blanches, causes to turn white (F. *blanc*).

221. *the argument* ; cf. 130. Claudius's next question certainly gives colour to the theory that he and the Queen did not take much note of the "dumb-show."



226. *Tropically*, figuratively; by a *trope* (literally 'a turn of speech,' Gk. *τρόπος*). The 1st Quarto has *trapically*, which suggests that there is really a quibble in *tropically* (pronounced loosely) on "mouse-trap." (F.)

227. Shakespeare makes *Vienna* the scene of his tragi-comedy or unpleasant love-intrigue, *Measure for Measure* (probably written just after *Hamlet* and closely linked to it in several ways).

228. *Gonzago*. "In 1538 the Duke of Urbino, married to a Gonzaga, was murdered by Luigi Gonzaga, who dropped poison into his ear. Shakespeare, it is suggested, might have found this writ in choice Italian, might have transferred the name Gonzaga to the murdered man, and formed 'Lucianus' from Luigi"—*Dowden*. The architect of the palace of Urbino was *Luciano da Laurano*.

*the duke's*. 'King,' 'duke,' and even 'count,' were often treated as interchangeable titles of a sovereign. (F.)

231, 232. A proverbial turn of phrase.

*withers*; "the juncture of the shoulder-bones of a horse at the end of the neck," i.e. just where the pressure of the saddle may "gall" the skin. Cf. 1 *Henry IV.* II. 1. 6—8, where the carrier tells the ostler to put some tufts of wool in the point of his horse's saddle because the "poor jade is wrung in the withers."

233. *nephew*. Was Hamlet afraid to press the resemblance too closely by making Lucianus "*brother* to the king"?

234. *a chorus*; the duty of which on the Elizabethan stage was to explain the action to the audience by means of speeches like the "Prologues" with which each Act of *Henry V.* is introduced.

235. *I could interpret*. "An 'interpreter' [as he was always called] formerly sat on the stage at all puppet-shows, and interpreted to the audience." (F.) The "interpreter," in fact, carried on the dialogue as in "Punch and Judy." The staple "argument" of the Elizabethan puppet-shows was the burlesque representation of some well-known play or contemporary event.

239, 240. "*the croaking raven*" etc. It has been shown that the quotation is made up from a couplet in *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third*, the old historical play, out of which Shakespeare fashioned 3 *Henry VI.* In Hamlet's mouth it is merely a satirical way of saying that all is ready for the foul deed.

243. Cf. the Witches-scenes in *Macbeth*, IV. 1.

244. *Hecate's*. In Elizabethan superstition (the derivative of classical and mediæval magic) Hecate is essentially *the* goddess of things



supernatural and magical. The scansion of the name as two syllables = *Hecat* is very common in poetry, indeed invariable in Shakespeare, except in the doubtful play *Henry VI.* (III. 2. 64).

246. *wholesome*; cf. I. 5. 70. *usurp*, i.e. *may* your deadly powers ("property") usurp on (= 'encroach on').

248. The "story" has not been found in any of the well-known Italian collections of *novelle*, such as Bandello's and Cinthio's, but S. may well have taken it from some as yet unidentified source, and "choice" rather suggests that he could read Italian. Ascham condemned the many "fonde [foolish] bookes, of late translated out of *Italian* into English, sold in every shop in London," *Schoolmaster* (1570).

252. *false fire*; probably a military metaphor; 'a blank discharge.'

257—260. These lines, and perhaps 267—270, may be ballad-snatches, slightly adapted by Hamlet to the circumstances.

257. *stricken*, i.e. by an arrow from a cross-bow. *weep*; a poetic tradition, if not a fact of natural history; cf. *As You Like It*, II, I. 33—43.

261. Feathers were much worn on the Elizabethan stage. "The only department of decoration which involved any considerable expense was the costumes of the actors. On these such large sums were lavished that the Puritans made this extravagance one of their chief points of attack upon theatres"—*Brandes*.

262. *turn Turk*; a proverbial phrase = 'to change utterly for the worse.' The original idea was to turn renegade to Christianity and embrace Mahomedanism.

262, 263. *Provincial roses*, i.e. rosettes worn on the front of the shoe to hide the laces. The fashion, which is often referred to by Elizabethan writers, was not limited to the stage. Ordinarily these rosettes were made of ribbons, but sometimes part of the leather of the shoe was used to form them; this was so with "*razed shoes*," i.e. shoes with the leather 'slashed or streaked in patterns' (F. *raser*, 'to scrape').

*Provincial* = *Provençal* (Lat. *provincialis*), 'belonging to *Provence*,' a former province of south-eastern France, famous for its roses.

263, 264. *a fellowship in a cry of players*, a partnership in a theatrical company. *cry*, a pack of hounds; so called from the hounds' *cry* or notes.

265. *a share*; Elizabethan actors were paid by shares of the proceeds, not by salaries.

269. Here, as again (III. 4. 56), the elder Hamlet is to his son like "Jove himself."

270. It has been shown that *pajock* represents *pea-jock* = *peacock*;



and that in Elizabethan natural history the peacock was supposed to embody many evil qualities.

272. *I'll take the ghost's word.* Yet Hamlet did not act. Why?

280. Hamlet breaks off at the entrance of the courtiers and ends in his assumed "antic" manner. *perdy*; F. *par Dieu*.

286. *distempered*; 'upset,' as we should say; they mean, 'in mind,' but Hamlet chooses to misunderstand them.

287. *With drink, sir?* "Hamlet takes particular care that his uncle's love of drink (I. 4. 8—12) shall not be forgotten"—*Johnson*.

291. *purgation*; "medicinally purging the body, legally clearing from imputation of guilt, as in *As You Like It*, v. 4. 45. Hamlet plays on the two senses"—*Dowden*.

293. *frame, order.*

310. *admiration, astonishment.*

319. *these pickers and stealers*, i.e. his hands; cf. the Catechism.

323. *Sir, I lack advancement*; said to throw them off the scent; he knows they will repeat to Claudius whatever he may say.

326, 327. "*While the grass grows*"; the rest of the proverb was "the silly horse starves." Hamlet "means to intimate that whilst he is waiting for the succession to the throne of Denmark, he may himself be taken off by death"—*Malone*. (F.)

*Re-enter Players with recorders.* A *recorder* (or *record*) was a kind of flute or flageolet with mouthpiece; so called in allusion to its sweetness of sound, from the old verb *record*='to sing.'

328, 329. *To withdraw with you*; will you step aside? The meaning would be made perfectly clear in the acting. We must remember that Shakespeare wrote for the stage, not the study. The fact explains many superficial obscurities.

329, 330. The metaphor is from sport. If you approach game, e.g. a stag, on the side from which the wind blows, the scent is carried by the wind, and the game, being startled, makes off in the opposite direction, where the net (the "toil") is spread.

*go about, try. recover the wind of*, get to windward of. Shakespeare sometimes uses *recover*='to get, gain, reach.'

331, 332. *if my duty be too bold* etc. Guildenstern blunders into a sort of apology, viz. that his "duty" to the King and Queen may indeed make him deal with Hamlet in a way that seems "too bold," but then his affection for Hamlet is too genuine to trouble about "manners"!

340. *ventages*, wind-holes, "stops."



354. *fret me*, make me angry; quibbling on *fret* = 'the stop of a musical instrument which regulates the vibration of the string.'

357. *presently*, at once; "by and by" in 365 has the same sense.

366. *bent*, limit of capacity; literally the "extent to which a bow may be bent or a spring wound up, degree of tension."

377. *Nero*; who caused his mother Agrippina to be murdered. Editors compare *King John*, v. 2. 152, 153.

379. *I will speak daggers to her*. So Benedick says of the sharp-tongued Beatrice (*Much Ado About Nothing*, II. 1. 255), "she speaks poniards, and every word stabs." Cf. III. 4. 94; 2 *Henry IV.* IV. 5. 107, "Thou hidest a thousand daggers in thy thoughts."

381. *shent*, rebuked. Shak. uses only the p.p. of *shend*, which Spenser has often, especially = 'to shame, disgrace.'

382. *To give them seals*, to ratify the words by actions.

### Scene 3.

3. *your commission*. We find later that the King's instructions to his English vassal-ally were conveyed in a sealed document, the contents of which would probably be unknown to the bearers.

5. *The terms of our estate*, i.e. his position as king.

11. *peculiar*, individual, private.

13. *noyance*, harm; see G.

14. *depends and rests*. The verbs may be regarded as singular because to the mind's eye of the speaker the (unspoken) subject is singular in sense (viz. 'existence'), though actually it takes a plural form. This idiom is frequent where the verb precedes the subject: as if the speaker had not decided what the subject was to be.

15. *The cease of majesty*, the death of a king. The impersonal turn of the phrase lends a vague impression, as of some great abstract force.

16. *gulf*, whirlpool; something that engulfs or swallows.

20. *mortised*, joined with a mortise. A mortise is the hole into which a rafter, or spoke (19) of a wheel, fits.

22. *ruin*; with the literal idea 'downfall' (Lat. *ruina*). The rhyme of the couplet marks an aphorism.

23. *a general groan*, i.e. one in which his people join.

24. *Arm*, prepare, make ready.

28. *convey*; implying secrecy. *Convey* often has a bad sense in Shakespeare, e.g. as a colloquial word for 'steal.' We find *conveyance* = 'dishonesty, trickery.' Cf. 3 *Henry VI.* III. 3. 160, "Thy sly conveyance and thy lord's false love."



29. *the process*, what transpires; literally 'that which proceeds,' i.e. happens. *tax*; cf. I. 4. 18. *home*, to the full, with no sparing.

30. *as you said*. "Polonius astutely (or obliviously) attributes his own suggestion to the king"—*Herford*. See III. 1. 181—188. "Cunning" is shown "when that which a man says to another, he lays it as if another had said it to him" (Bacon, *Essay* XXII.).

33. *of vantage*, from a favourable point.

56. *the offence*, i.e. the thing acquired by sin; the "effect" (54) of sin; cf. "the wicked prize" (59) = 'the prize of wickedness.'

58. *gilded*; and so able to bribe.

61—64. 'The language is that of "the law" (60). Thus *action* has the double sense 'deed' and 'legal action,' and *lies* (= 'lies bare, is seen in its bare colours') has reference to the legal phrase that 'an action *lies*,' i.e. can be brought against someone.

Shakespeare's partiality for legal terms and accuracy in using them (cf. v. 1. 95—107) indicate a considerable knowledge of law, and it has been conjectured that as a youth he may have been in an attorney's office. But his use of technical terms in general is very correct. *King Lear* shows that his medical knowledge was great; yet the medical profession have not claimed him as a doctor.

62. *his*, its. Understand *are* from the verbs in 61.

64. *what rests?* Lat. *quid restat?* Lat. *restare*, 'to remain.'

69. *engaged*, entangled; like a fluttering bird in a snare ("limed").

75. *that would be scann'd*, that must be considered!

Is the reluctance genuine, one of Hamlet's Christian scruples (76—94), or another evasion of duty and action?

77. *his sole son*; on whom therefore the duty of revenge solely lies.

79. *this is hire and salary*; to deal with Claudius thus (77, 78) is to do him a service which he might have hired and paid Hamlet to render him. (F.) Hamlet does not know that Claudius has just planned a second murder (Hamlet's own)!

80. *took*; with the idea of 'taking at a disadvantage.'

*full of bread*; an allusion to *Ezekiel* xvi. 49.

81. A reminiscence of the Ghost's words (I. 5. 76).

82. *audit*, final account. Shakespeare is rather fond of this metaphor of a steward of an estate who at the "audit"-day has to give an account of receipts and expenditure to the owner. Compare again the Ghost's words, I. 5. 78.

83. *in our circumstance and course of thought*, so far as we can judge roughly; according to the general drift and range of our opinions.



Some interpret 'in our mortal condition and in (or 'according to') the range of our thoughts.' This really gives two senses (by *zeugma*) to the preposition.

85. *him*; in the acting there would be no confusion with *his* and *him* in the previous lines; Hamlet would here point to Claudius.

88. *know thou a more horrid hent*; literally 'may you have a more horrible seizure,' i.e. may this hand of mine seize you for the execution of a deed made more horrible by circumstances (89—91) than his murder now would be. Other suggested interpretations of *hent* are (1) 'opportunity, occasion seized,' (2) 'intention, design.'

92—94. "This speech, in which Hamlet, represented [in the play] as a virtuous character, is not content with taking blood for blood, but contrives damnation for the man that he would punish, is too horrible to be read or to be uttered"—*Johnson*. But Hamlet's uncle is to fare as his "father's spirit" (79—84), I. 5. 12, 13.

#### Scene 4.

2. *broad*, unrestrained.

4. *sconce*, hide; oftener, *ensconce*; see G.

14. *the rood*, the Cross; A.S. *rôd*; the same as *rod*, 'a pole.' The modern stage-custom of introducing in this scene some emblems of religion gives significance to this line and 47, 48.

*Makes a pass*; a fencing term. *pass* = 'a thrust'; cf. v. 2. 61.

28, 29. The only direct hint that the Queen was privy to her husband's fate. Probably Hamlet is unjust in his taunt. Claudius knew the Queen too well to tell her. She is no Lady Macbeth. Alone together, they never hint at the matter.

38. *sense*, feeling.

46. *contraction*, marriage-contract.

49. *this solidity* etc.; the earth.

50. *tristful*, sorrowful; the word is in character with the style of the whole passage; Falstaff uses it (1 *Henry IV.* II. 4, 435, 436) in his parody of the old-fashioned ranting type of tragedy.

*as against the doom*, as if the Judgment-day were at hand. Cf. passages such as *Luke* xxi. 25, 26, 2 *Peter* iii. 10, 11.

51. *thought-sick*, filled with anxiety; see III. 1. 85, note.

52. *in the index*. "The Index used formerly to be placed at the beginning of a book, not at the end, as now." The old "Index" was more what we call a "Table of Contents." (F.) Paraphrase: 'what act that needs to be *prefaced* in this tremendous style?'



53. *this picture and this*. The stage-tradition favours miniatures (one worn by Hamlet, the other by the Queen), perhaps because this gives scope for more effective "business." Thus some actors make Hamlet tear the miniature of Claudius from the Queen's neck and fling it away, or stamp on it. But the description of the elder Hamlet, especially 58—62, certainly indicates a portrait on the wall, and it is just possible that Shakespeare knew of the gallery of portraits in the Castle at Elsinore. (F.)

The theory that the "pictures" are imaginary—hallucinations—seems to me essentially unsound. It makes the whole episode practically an anticipation of the great incident at 101 of the scene.

54. *counterfeit* = 'counterfeited,' in the sense 'portrayed.'

56. *Hyperion*; cf. I. 2. 140. *front*, brow (Lat. *frons*).

58. *station*, pose of figure, attitude in standing. *Mercury*, the winged messenger of the gods in classical mythology; Gk. *Hermes*. Mercury typified grace and beauty; cf. his classical epithet *χαριδότης*, 'giver of grace.'

66. *on this fair mountain*; suggested by 59. *leave*, cease.

67. *batten*, grow fat; see G. The word is commonly used of animals, so that here it is contemptuous and implies gross feeling.

69. *hey-day*, frolicsome wildness. "'The *hey day* of youth' means the '*high day* of youth.' The spelling *hey* is a preservation of Middle E. *hey*, the usual spelling of *high* in the 14th century"—*Skeat*.

71. *Sense*, feeling, sensibility.

72. *motion*; perhaps 'impulses,' rather than 'emotions.'

77. *cozen'd*; see G. *hoodman-blind*, blind-man's buff.

81. *Could not so mope*, could not commit such stupidity. The short line indicates Hamlet's great passion; he has to pause for coherence.

83. *mutine*, rebel like a mutineer; see V. 2. 6.

88. *panders*, acts as pander to.

90. *grained*, deeply dyed; see G.

94. *like daggers*; cf. III. 2. 379.

97. *a vice of kings*, a clown of a king, a 'merry Andrew' of a monarch. The reference is to the Vice of the old 'Morality' plays, in which the Devil, a personification of wickedness, and the Vice were traditional characters, representing the popular comic element. Each was marked by a traditional equipment. The Vice, attired in a long particoloured Fool's coat, a vizor, and a cap with ass's ears, bore a dagger of lath (wood); the Devil, often dressed as a bear, had long talons and carried a club. The chief fun of the scenes in which they appeared was that



the Vice belaboured the Devil with the dagger of lath, so that he roared again with pain, and tried to cut the Devil's talons. In the end the Devil descended to the infernal regions with the Vice on his back. From the character of the Vice was developed the Clown or Fool of Shakespeare's plays. Cf. *Twelfth Night*, IV. 2, where the Clown tells the imprisoned Malvolio that he will return again in a moment as swift as "the old Vice." See *Shakespeare's England*, II. 255, 256.

101. *of shreds and patches*; referring to the "motley" dress of the Vice or Clown. Cf. *patch* = 'clown, fool, simpleton,' e.g. in *The Tempest*, III. 2. 71, "What a pied ninny's this! Thou scurvy patch!" The professional jester or fool attached to a court or nobleman's house was called a *patch* from his *patch*-like, 'motley' dress: hence 'Patch' became a kind of nickname; Wolsey had two jesters so named.

This phrase of *shreds and patches* has become proverbial.

*Enter Ghost*. The precise moment of the Ghost's intervention corresponds with the reproof in 111—114 and the previous admonition to Hamlet (I. 5. 84—88).

106. *lapsed in time* etc., sunk in delay and mere emotion, such as his almost hysterical outbursts (e.g. II. 2. 526—565).

107. *important*; probably = 'importunate, urgent,' as in *King Lear*, IV. 4. 26, and elsewhere.

113. *Conceit*, imagination; cf. II. 2. 529, 533.

120. *bedded*, lying flat, as in bed; a continuation of the metaphor in 119. *excrement*, Lat. *excrementum*, 'out-growth,' from *ex*, 'out' + *crescere*, 'to grow.' Used of hair in *The Comedy of Errors*, II. 2. 79.

121. *Start...stand*; plural in attraction to the other plural words.

126. *capable*, i.e. of feeling; susceptible.

128. *effects*, actions.

129. *Will want true colour*, will not present its proper appearance, i.e. of "blood." Perhaps a quibble on *colour* = 'palliation, justification.'

134. *in his habit as he lived*, i.e. not in armour, as before, on the open battlements (Act I.). Indeed, the 1st Quarto has the stage-direction at 101, *Enter the Ghost in his night gowne* (i.e. dressing-gown—cf. *Macbeth*, II. 2. 70).

144. *that flattering unction*, the salve of that deceptive notion. For the form of phrase (literally 'the unction of that flattery') cf. III. 1. 67.

150. *compost*; literally 'mixture' (Lat. *compositum*); here 'manure.'

154. *curb*; in its etymological sense 'to bend'; F. *courber*, 'to bend a bow,' from Lat. *curvare*.

160, 161. *That monster, custom*, etc. 'That monster, custom, who



destroys all sensibility, being the evil genius of our habits, is nevertheless a good angel in this particular' etc. (F.)

A clever, but not necessary, change is *evil* for *devil*—thus: 'that monster, custom, who eats away all sense of our evil habits, i.e. inures us to them.' It loses the antithesis, "devil"—"angel."

It is true to Hamlet's character that he should view "custom" from its bad side only, and regard its habitual function as that of a deadening and corrupting influence. For *sense* = 'sensibility' (i.e. in respect of sin, as the context implies), cf. 71—74.

163. "Just as a new dress or uniform becomes familiar to us by habit, so custom enables us readily to execute the outward and practical part of the good and fair actions which we inwardly desire to do"—*Moberly*.

167. *the stamp of nature*, the inborn disposition—what nature has stamped on the character. Cf. 1. 4. 31, 32.

170. *blest'd*, i.e. by Heaven; a way of saying 'when you repent.'

174. *their*, i.e. of "heaven" = 'the heavenly powers.'

178. *worse remains behind*; emphasised by some gesture, such as pointing to (or stamping on) the picture of Claudius. Cf. *Macbeth*, III. 2. 55, "Things bad begun make themselves strong by ill" (proverbial).

182. *mouse*; a term of endearment, as in *Twelfth Night*, 1. 5. 69.

183. *reechy*; literally 'smoky'; hence 'grimy, filthy.' Cf. *Coriolanus*,

II. 1. 225. A softened form of *reeky*, from *reek*, 'smoke, vapour,' cognate with Germ. *rauch*, 'smoke.'

186, 187. Referring to 138—143.

189. *paddock*, toad; see G. *gib*, a tom-cat.

190. *Such dear concernings*, matters that concern him so closely.

193. *the famous ape*; the story alluded to is not known. The reference sounds oriental.

194. *To try conclusions*, to see what will happen, to make experiments, i.e. of flying, like the escaped birds.

199—204. Editors note that it is not explained how Hamlet himself knew this. Some think that he had it from Horatio, who might hear the court-rumours; others that Hamlet overheard Claudius's conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (III. 3). We may assume that Claudius had told the Queen, who knew (200).

205. *engineer*; cf. *pioneer*, 1. 5. 163 (note).

206. *Hoist with his own petar*. Now a proverbial saying; literally "blown into the air by his own bomb; hence, injured or destroyed by his own device for the ruin of others." *hoist*, i.e. hoisted.



*petar*; commonly *petard*; a mortar filled with explosives, used for blowing up obstacles such as the walls and gates of a besieged city. F. *péter*, 'to explode, burst.'

210. *packing*; "plotting (with a play upon the other sense, to be off quickly)"—*Herford*. For the former sense see *The Taming of the Shrew*, v. 1. 121. The latter is common enough; cf. the pretty old song, "Pack, clouds, away, and welcome day."

## ACT IV.

### Scene 1.

11. *brainish*, headstrong, passionate; not 'brainsick.'

13—17. The selfishness of Claudius: 'I might have been the victim'—'I shall be blamed': not a word of pity for poor Polonius.

18. *kept short*, kept under control; practically = "restrained."

*haunt*, company, society.

25. *ore*; clearly in the sense 'gold'; see G.

26, 27. *a mineral*, a mine. *he weeps for what is done*; perhaps she says this to shield Hamlet.

42. *As level as*, as straight as the cannon-ball reaches its mark; cf. IV. 5. 134, 135.

*blank*; the white mark (*blank*=F. *blanc*) in the centre of a target, hence 'aim.'

44. *the woundless air*; cf. I. 1. 145, note.

### Scene 2.

12. *replication*; a legal term for 'reply, rejoinder.'

15. *countenance*, patronage, favour.

17. *he keeps them, like an ape*; the 1st Quarto (1603) adds the explanatory words *doth nuts*, but they are easily understood.

22. *sleeps in*, is lost upon.

26, 27. *The body is with the king* etc. Hamlet's enigmas generally have an inner significance—for himself. So here he may mean: 'the body of Polonius is with (the late, the real) king, in the other world, but Claudius (*your* king) is not yet with that body,' i.e. has not been killed (said in self-reproach).

28, 29. *A thing...Of nothing*. Editors quote *Psalm* cxliv., "Man is like a thing of naught."



29, 30. *Hide fox, and all after*; "a cry said to be used in the game of 'hide and seek.' The fox is Polonius, and Hamlet joins in the chase"—*Herford*. Hamlet, as he speaks, runs off the stage. Perhaps the cry belonged to the old game "Fox and Hounds."

### Scene 3.

6. *scourge*, punishment.

9. *Deliberate pause*, the result of deliberate consideration.

9, 10. A proverbial saying.

21, 22. A punning reference to the Diet of Worms; cf. "emperor." *politic*, i.e. "such as might breed in a politician's corpse"—*Dowden*.

*Your*; cf. III. 2. 3 (note).

31. *progress*; the regular word in Shakespeare's time for the state-journeys of the sovereign through England.

40. *tender*, are concerned for. Claudius does not know that Hamlet had found out, before the death of Polonius, that he was to be sent to England.

47. *I see a cherub* etc.; meaning, to himself, that the cherub gives him a warning sign not to trust Claudius. See pp. 227, 228.

53. *at foot*, at his heels.

57—61. The Danes in England.

59. *cicatrice*, the scar left by a wound (Lat. *cicatrix*).

61. *set*, estimate, value; an extension of the use in I. 4. 65. The idea of 'undervaluing, not heeding' is implied in "coldly."

62. *process*, mandate—not 'procedure, action'; see note on I. 5. 37.

63, 64. *congruing*, agreeing. *present*, immediate.

### Scene 4.

Shakespeare's side-scenes are a specially instructive feature of his dramatic method. The present is essentially a scene of character-contrast: Fortinbras, the resolute man of action, set over against Hamlet, the hesitating dreamer: and the contrast is made more striking by Hamlet's own appreciation of it, and by the difference of their respective motives of action.

1—4. Cf. II. 2. 76—82.

6. *in his eye*, in his presence, to him personally.

8. *softly*; taken to mean 'slowly.'

15. *the main of Poland*, i.e. Poland in general, not merely "some frontier." For *main* = 'mainland' (not sea) cf. *King Lear*, III. 1. 6:



“Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,  
Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main.”

20. *five ducats, five*; the numeral is repeated to emphasise the triviality of the stake at issue.

22. *A ranker rate*, a higher value.

*fee*; what lawyers term *fee-simple*.

26. *Will*; emphatic: ‘it surely cannot be that they mean to.’

27. *imposthume*, abscess; in medical language, ‘a purulent swelling’ (i.e. full of corrupt matter or *pus*); hence used figuratively of the ‘swelling’ of pride, insolence, etc.

32, 33. From opposite types—from the soldiers as from the Players—comes the same reproach to Hamlet, the same instigation to act.

34. *market*, profit; or ‘employment.’

36. *discourse*, faculty of reason: see I. 2. 150.

39. *fust*, grow mouldy. *whether*=*wher* metrically.

41. *event*, issue, result (Lat. *eventus*); cf. 50.

44. *to do*; the gerund: cf. phrases like ‘a house *to let*,’ ‘water *to drink*.’ This was the old idiom.

48. *tender*, i.e. in years; “young Fortinbras” (I. 1. 95).

53—56. *Rightly to be great* etc. ‘True greatness does not consist in springing to action on any trivial cause, but in feeling that where honour is at stake the merest trifle is a ground of dispute.’ The negative qualifies *is*, not the predicate, *to stir*. (F.)

The important part of Hamlet’s definition is obviously lines 55, 56.

58. *blood*, passion.

60. *twenty thousand*; it marks his excitement that he confounds the numbers of the soldiers and of the ducats.

61. *trick*. Some interpret ‘whim’; others ‘toy, plaything.’ Shakespeare’s use of *trick* justifies either explanation.

64. *continent*, cover; ‘that which contains them.’ The word often has the literal idea of Lat. *continere*, ‘to contain, keep in’; thus in *A Midsummer-Night’s Dream*, II. 1. 92, it is used of river-banks.

### Scene 5.

2, 3. *distract*, distracted, mad. Shakespeare uses these short forms of the p.p. often. They reflect the influence of the Latin forms; cf. *distractus*. *will*, must; cannot fail to.

6. *Spurns*, i.e. with the foot. *enviously*, angrily.

7. *her speech is nothing*; cf. *The Merchant of Venice*, I. 1. 113,



114: "Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing," i.e. talks a vast amount of nonsense (οὐδὲν λέγει). See again 157.

8. *unshaped*, not guided by the understanding, incoherent.

9. *to collection*, to infer her meaning; cf. the phrase 'to *gather* the sense of.'

11—13. Cf. I. 5. 173—179.

18. *Each toy*, every trifle; see *toy* in G. *amiss*, misfortune.

19. *jealousy*, suspicion.

20. *spills*, destroys itself (i.e. by self-betrayal); see G.

23. *How should I your true love know?* The traditional stage-music of this ballad is supposed to be the same, or nearly, as that used in Shakespeare's time. It would naturally be passed on from one generation of actors to another. (F.)

The ballad-snatches in this scene are all of unknown authorship. That is the great characteristic of ballads. Indeed, the composition of ancient ballad-literature is probably "communal" to a great extent, not simply individual.

25. *By his cockle hat*. A cockle-shell in the hat denoted that the wearer had made a pilgrimage to the shrine of St James of Compostella, one of the most famous of mediæval shrines, in the north-west of Spain, not far from Cape Finisterre. A scallop-shell indicated a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The "holy Palmer" in *Marmion* (i.e. the disguised De Winton) has both shells; cf. I. xxiii. and xxvii.

26. *shoon*; an archaic form even in Shakespeare's time, commonly limited to a traditional phrase ("clouted shoon") which somehow survived till Milton (*Comus*, 635).

Of the inflexion *en=an* in A.S. the only survival in common use is *oxen=A.S. ox-an*. Cf. also *eyne* for *eyen* (eyes) in Shakespeare.

37. *Larded*, garnished.

41. *God'ild you*; literally 'God *yield* you,' = 'reward, repay you.' The original expression—'God *yield* you'—being an every-day form of thanks, got corrupted into various perversions.

*They say the owl* etc. "This is a common story among the vulgar in Gloucestershire, and is thus related: 'Our Saviour went into a baker's shop where they were baking, and asked for some bread to eat. The mistress of the shop immediately put a piece of dough into the oven to bake for him, but was reprimanded by her daughter, who, insisting that the piece of dough was too large, reduced it to a very small size. The dough, however, immediately afterwards began to swell, and presently became of an enormous size. Whereupon the



baker's daughter cried out, "Heugh, heugh, heugh," which owl-like noise probably induced our Saviour for her wickedness to transform her into that bird.' This story is often related to children, in order to deter them from such illiberal behaviour to poor people"—*Douce*. (F.)

"Daughter" is what starts the idea in Ophelia's distracted thoughts.

43. *God be at your table!* meaning perhaps: 'May God bless your table with his presence, so that you may not meet with as sudden a fate as the baker's daughter or my father.'

44. *Conceit upon*, she is thinking of.

47. *Saint Valentine's day*. "This song alludes to the custom of the first girl seen by a man on the morning of this day being considered his Valentine or true-love....The custom of the different sexes choosing themselves mates on St Valentine's Day, 14th February, the names being selected either by lots or methods of divination, is of great antiquity in England. The name so drawn was the Valentine of the drawer." (F.) It was a popular notion (see *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, IV. I. 144, 145) that on this day the birds selected their mates.

66. *greenly*, foolishly; from *green* = 'unripe,' 'inexperienced.'

67. *In hugger-mugger*, in secrecy and haste, i.e. without due ceremony. The expression, which does not occur elsewhere in Shakespeare's work, is another undoubted echo of his study of Plutarch's *Life* of Julius Cæsar. Cf. North's *Plutarch*, "Antony thinking good that [Cæsar's] body should be honourably buried, and not in *hugger-mugger*." See I. I. 109—125, notes.

72. *keeps himself in clouds*, i.e. holds aloof mysteriously.

75. *Wherein necessity* etc.; in which matter (or 'in which speeches'), having nothing definite to go on, people will not scruple to spread abroad charges against us. *necessity*, want, need (i.e. of definite knowledge of the facts).

78. *murdering-piece*; the name of a small piece of artillery that was loaded with small bullets, nails, old iron, and the like; also called 'a murderer'; F. *meurtrière*. (F.)

80. *Switzers*; the royal guards; literally 'Swiss mercenary soldiers.' "In many of our old plays the guards attendant on kings are called 'Switzers,' and that without any regard to the country where the scene lies." Editors quote an old saying: "Law, logicke and the Switzers, may be hired to fight for any body." (F.) The Popes have long had a "Swiss Guard." The heroic loyalty of the "Swiss Guard" of Louis XVI. on the terrible August 10, 1792, is immortalised in the famous sculpture the "Lion" at Lucerne.



82. *list*, boundary; oftener plural, as in 'the lists of a tournament,' literally 'the barriers,' and so 'the space enclosed by the barriers.'

84. From this point Laertes supplies the main element of character-contrast: placed in the same position as Hamlet, and acting so differently. Moreover, "the ease with which he raises the people" shows us how easily Hamlet (the people's favourite) might have acted, i.e. "how purely internal were the obstacles which [he] had to overcome"—*Bradley*. *in a riotous head*, with a band of rioters.

86. *as*, as if; cf. II. I. 85.

88. The line is a way of emphasising the fact that "antiquity" and "custom" are the very foundation and fabric of society.

The "people" does not fare well in Shakespeare's plays. We have seen Hamlet's contempt for its judgment (II. 2. 416—422). One of the main features of *Julius Cæsar* and *Coriolanus* is the representation of the fickleness of the crowd. The popular but constitutional movement of Jack Cade is essentially misrepresented in those scenes of *2 Henry VI.* which are commonly assigned to Shakespeare. A section of the citizen-class was opposed to the stage, and their numbers and hostility increased as Puritanism grew; dramatists might well retort by caricature.

92. *trail*; cf. II. 2. 47. *cry*, 'give tongue,' like hounds when they strike the scent; cf. III. 2. 263.

93. *counter*; a term of the chase, to describe a hound hunting the trail backward, in the contrary direction (Lat. *contra*). This is apt to occur where there is a "check" and the pack is casting round to pick up the scent again. The word *counter* occurs usually as an adverb with verbs like 'run,' 'hunt.' To 'hunt or run *heel*' is the modern term.

The Queen, of course, means that the people are false to their own action in electing Claudius king.

100—103. 'Laertes is not his father's son if he does not avenge his father.'

105. *fear*, i.e. fear for. Here Claudius shows to best advantage; calmly confronting the danger.

106. *There's such divinity* etc. The theory of the Divine Right of Kings is brought out more strongly in *Richard II.* than in any other play of Shakespeare. But the theory is an anachronism there. It grew up under the Tudors, especially Elizabeth, and reached its zenith under the Stuarts. Similarly the "imperial" conception of England glanced at twice in *Henry V.* (Prologues, II. 10 and V. 30) was essentially Tudor, having its origin in Henry VIII.'s breach with the Papacy and the Emperor. Shakespeare's history was coloured by the conditions and views of his own day.

108. *his*, its (treason's).



117. i.e. he disregards equally this life and the life to come.

124—126. i.e. are you so blindly bent on revenge that you will make no distinction between friend and foe? like a gambler who draws in the whole stake, whether he has won it all or not? (F.)

129, 130. *the...life-rendering pelican*; alluding to the belief that the pelican feeds its young with blood from its own breast; cf. *King Lear*, III. 4. 77, where the King calls Goneril and Regan his "pelican daughters" because they have treated him much as the young pelicans are fabled to treat their parent. Mediæval preachers made the pelican the type of Christ.

133. *sensibly*, keenly, feelingly.

144—146. *Nature is fine in love* etc. "Nature is delicate in love, and sends Ophelia's sanity after Polonius as a precious token (or sample) of itself"—*Dowden*.

148. *Hey nonny, nonny* (short for *nonino*) is a favourite refrain (with variations) of old ballads.

The constant mention or introduction of ballads old and new is a marked feature of the Elizabethan drama. A great quantity of these ballads has survived in popular song-books and collections of airs. They support other evidence which shows that in Shakespeare's time the English were a very musical race, and that a knowledge of music was widespread. Some think that Puritanism had much to do with the decline of music in England as a national taste and recreation.

Shakespeare's *own* songs—such as "Come away, come away, death" (*Twelfth Night*, II. 4), "Blow, blow, thou winter wind" (*As You Like It*, II. 7)—have the great characteristic that "they are made for their place," i.e. exquisitely appropriate each to its context.

153. *a-down a-down*. Another ballad-refrain, which occurs in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, I. 4. 44.

The thought, presumably, in Ophelia's mind is that Polonius has been "called a-down" into his grave.

155. *O, how the wheel becomes it!* O, how prettily the spinning-wheel and the song go together! Cf. *Twelfth Night*, II. 4, where the Duke bids the Clown sing an old-world ballad ("Come away, come away, death") and says:

"Mark it, Cesario; it is old and plain:

The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,

And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,

Do use to chant it;"

where, of course, "spinsters" has its literal sense 'those who spin.'



The theory that *wheel* means 'burden, refrain' (referring to "a-down a-down" etc.), because the 'burden' recurs like the revolutions of a wheel, is unsupported by any evidence whatever. Moreover, the 2nd Folio's reading *wheel* *become* *it* shows that *wheel* was then (1632) understood in its ordinary sense. (F.)

155, 156. *It is the false steward* etc. This allusion to some ballad or song, like the reference to "the famous ape" (III. 4. 193), has not been traced. A stage-custom is to identify "the false steward" with Claudius, from whom she starts in horror. He had "stolen" much.

157. *This nothing's more than matter*; Ophelia's nonsense (7) is more affecting than any sense could be.

158—166. All the flowers have a meaning in "the language of flowers," and from the qualities they represent we may conjecture their respective recipients.

158, 159. "To Laertes, whom in her distraction she probably confounds with her lover, she gives 'rosemary' as an emblem of his faithful remembrance; and 'pansies' to denote love's 'thoughts' (F. *pensées*) or 'troubles.'" (F.)

*Rosemary* is mentioned as the symbol of remembrance, for both marriages and funerals, in *Romeo and Juliet*, IV. 5. 79, 80, 89.

160. *document*; in its literal sense 'instruction, teaching' (Lat. *documentum*, from *docere*, 'to teach').

162. *fennel*, symbolical of dissembling and flattery (perhaps because a favourite food of the serpent, "the subtlest beast of all the field"); *columbines*, of unfaithfulness in wedlock, from their horned shape. These flowers are both given to Claudius—the "smiling villain" (I. 5. 106), who "with witchcraft of his wit" (I. 5. 43) stole the love of his brother's wife.

162—165. *there's rue for you* etc. Ophelia is speaking to the Queen. The popular name for *rue* was *herb of grace* or *herb-grace*, and the particular "grace" meant was repentance, since it was supposed wrongly that the name of the plant (Lat. *ruta*) came from the verb *rue* = 'to repent' (cf. Germ. *reue*, 'repentance'). But sometimes *rue* is the emblem of sorrow without the notion of contrition for wrong-doing.

The two cognate ideas—'repentance' and 'sorrowful remembrance'—are present in Ophelia's speech: *she* will wear *rue* as a symbol of her sorrow (for *she* has no great misdoing to repent of), but Hamlet's mother will wear it as a symbol of contrition.

Ophelia speaks as if the Queen could show by her way of



wearing the rue that it symbolised in her case something different from what it meant in Ophelia's.

*with a difference.* A phrase from heraldry (an art and practice far more familiar to the Elizabethans than it is to us). An heraldic *difference* is "an alteration of or addition to a coat of arms to distinguish a junior member or branch of a family from the chief line."

165. *a daisy*; another emblem of dissembling; equally appropriate in itself to Claudius or the Queen, but probably given to the latter, whom she has last addressed. Each will then have received a pair of flowers from her.

*I would give you some violets*, i.e. for your faithfulness; the recipient being probably Horatio. (F.)

166, 167. *he made a good end*; a proverbial phrase.

168. *For bonny sweet Robin* etc. A lost ballad (probably about Robin Hood, referred to in other contemporary works. (F.)

169. *Thought*; implying sad thoughts, melancholy. See III. i. 85.

171. *And will he not come again?* Part of a ballad sung to an old tune called *The Milkmaid's Dumps*. (F.)

This mad scene is one of the most famous in all dramatic literature and has inspired similar scenes, e.g. of Shakespeare's successors Fletcher (in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*) and Webster (in *The White Devil*).

180, 181. Said to have been a common ending of inscriptions on monuments. *of*, *on*.

188. *touch'd*, i.e. with guilt; the metaphor perhaps of 'plague-infected.'

195. *hatchment*, escutcheon, blazoned with the arms of a deceased person and placed over his tomb. The word is short for *achievement*, the old heraldic term for "an escutcheon or ensign armorial, granted in memory of some *achievement*, or distinguished feat."

198. *That*, so that.

### Scene 6.

1. *What*, what sort of people?

15. *appointment*, equipment; cf. "disappointed," I. 5. 77.

19. *thieves of mercy*, i.e. merciful thieves.

24. *bore*, calibre; the metaphor of a gun; cf. "light," the metaphor of a light charge for a cannon.

26. *hold their course*; a designedly innocent phrase, lest the letter should fall into wrong hands.



## Scene 7.

5. *Pursued my life.* Cf. III. 4. 26, IV. 1. 13.

6. *feats*, deeds (Lat. *facta*); implying 'evil deeds.' Cf. *Macbeth*, I. 7. 80, where "this terrible feat" refers to the murder of Duncan. Shak. more often uses the duplicate word *fact* in this sense 'crime.'

9. *mainly*, strongly, forcibly.

14. *conjunctive*. "The idea of planetary conjunction seems to have suggested the line that follows"—*Dowden*.

15. *sphere*, orbit.

17. *count*, account, i.e. trial, judgment.

18. *the general gender*, the people, the masses.

19—24. A signal illustration of that wealth and rapid change of metaphor which characterise Shakespeare's later style.

20. *spring*. "In Harrison's *Description of England* (ed. Furnivall, p. 349) it is stated that the baths of King's Newnham, in Shakespeare's county, Warwickshire, have the property of turning wood to stone. The reference was supposed by Reed to be to the dropping well at Knaresborough"—*Dowden*.

26. *terms*, condition.

27. *if praises* etc.; if Laertes may praise her *as she once was*.

28. *challenger*, i.e. "of all the age." *on mount*, i.e. conspicuously, so that the whole world should see the challenger, whose "worth" claimed to have no living equal.

40. *Claudio*; curious that a name so like the King's should be chosen.

50. *abuse*, deception.

58. The King is at once incredulous (49, 50) but impressed by the strong evidence (51).

62. *checking at*, abandoning, literally 'swerving aside from.' A hawk *checks* "when she forsakes her proper game, and follows some other of inferior kind that crosses her in her flight."

Shakespeare had a thorough knowledge of country life and sport. His "early literary work proves that while in the country he eagerly studied birds, flowers, and trees, and gained a detailed knowledge of horses and dogs. All his kinsfolk were farmers, and with them he doubtless as a youth practised many field sports. Sympathetic references to hawking, hunting [notably stag-hunting], coursing, and angling abound in his early plays and poems." Metaphors drawn from falconry



(the favourite sport of the Elizabethans) are specially frequent, and his use of the technical terms shows the true sportsman.

67. *uncharge the practice*, never suspect the plot. As *to charge* is 'to accuse,' so *uncharge* is 'to acquit.' For *practice* = 'plot,' see 138, and cf. *King Lear*, II. 1. 75, "To thy suggestion, plot and damned practice."

76. *siege*, rank; literally 'seat' (F. *siège*). The metaphor is that of guests at a feast, as in *Macbeth*, III. 4. 1.

79, 80. *livery*; in Elizabethan E. = 'any kind of dress'; literally 'something delivered,' i.e. by a lord to his household. *weeds*; see G.

81. *Importing health*; "denoting an attention to health."

84. *they can well*, i.e. are expert. This represents the old independent use of *can*, originally a preterite from A.S. *cunnan*, 'to know how.'

87. *incorpsed and demi-natured*; like the Centaurs.

89. i.e. what he *did* exceeded the utmost I could imagine. The Normans were famous as horsemen (*Shakespeare's England*, II. 411).

92. *Lamond*. Some think that the name covers (in a semi-French form) an allusion to a famous Italian cavalier and huntsman, Pietro Monte, instructor in horsemanship at the Court of Louis VII. That some personal allusion is intended seems probable; for the whole passage (83—94) has rather the air of being specially introduced.

93. *brooch*, ornament. A reference to the custom of wearing an ornamental buckle or pin in the hat.

96. *a masterly report*, a report of your masterly skill.

100. *scrimers*, fencers; see G.

101. *motion*; a technical term for "the attack in fencing, opposed to 'guard' or parrying." Cf. *Twelfth Night*, III. 4. 304.

111. The general sense seems to be that love—i.e. love in general, not a particular phase of it—is conditioned by time.

112. *passages of proof*, incidents that prove the fact.

*passage*; literally 'something that passes, i.e. happens.'

116. i.e. nothing keeps at the same level of goodness always ("still").

117. *plurisy*; here used in the sense 'plethora'; see G.

118. *his*, its.

118—123. *that we would do* etc. 'We should act at once when we are minded to; for the will to act is liable to be diminished or delayed in innumerable ways, e.g. through the persuasion or ridicule of others, through resistance or restraint, through the mere chances of life; and then the self-condemnation "I know I ought to do it" is an anodyne that relieves yet harms the conscience, just as a sigh relieves the oppressed



bosom but exhausts the blood' (i.e. because this vague self-condemnation reconciles us to inaction and thus enfeebles the will-power on which action depends).

It is a fine piece of "irony" that Claudius should condemn the irresolution to which he owes the prolongation of his own life. And what he says as to the power of "accidents" is strikingly illustrated by the whole drift of *Hamlet*, more particularly by the *dénouement*.

122. *spendthrift*, wasteful; an allusion to the old medical idea that every sigh costs the person a drop of blood. Cf. "*blood-consuming sighs*" and "*blood-drinking sighs*," 2 *Henry VI.* III. 2. 61, 63. There is an element of truth in the idea, since depression of spirit has a physical effect on the heart, the great blood-vessel of the body; a fact which Shakespeare evidently knew—*The Merchant of Venice*, I. 1. 81, 82. "Broken hearts" are literally a cause of death.

127. *sanctuarize*, give sanctuary from.

134. *remiss*; 'careless' rather than 'neglectful.'

138. *unbated*, not blunted; without a button fixed to the end, as on a foil. *a pass of practice*; probably 'a treacherous thrust.'

141. *mountebank*, a quack doctor.

143. *cataplasm*, plaster.

144, 145. *Collected...Under the moon*, i.e. gathered by moonlight (when their "virtue" or efficacy was thought greatest). *simples*; see G.

150. *our shape*, our scheme; what we are *shaping* = 'devising.' Some say 'our form of proceeding.'

154. The metaphor of a gun exploding under trial.

155. *your cunnings*, your respective skill.

160. *chalice*. Shakespeare probably recalled this line when he wrote *Macbeth*, I. 7. 10—12:

"even-handed justice

Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice

To our own lips."

161. *stuck*, thrust; see G.

163, 164. Cf. IV. 5. 61, 62.

166—183. The Queen, it may be supposed, speaks from the report of some eye-witness of the event. What she says, justifies the verdict ("doubtful") of the Church (v. 1. 220).

For Laertes, the news of Ophelia's death clinches the whole matter and dispels any reluctance he may have felt in agreeing to the plot against Hamlet. Thus the Ophelia-interest is drawn still more within



the circle of the main Hamlet-interest; and Laertes's want of scruple is set against Hamlet's sensitiveness in prosecuting his revenge.

166. *willow*; the symbol of forsaken or unsuccessful love.

167. Cf. Tennyson's "Willows *whiten*, aspens quiver" (*The Lady of Shalott*). The single epithet "hoar" (indicating the under side of the willow leaves—the side turned to the stream) suggests to the mind's eye the grey, appropriate tone of the whole colouring of the picture.

169. *crow-flower*; a popular name for the buttercup (*Ranunculus*).

*long purples*; a kind of orchid (*Orchis mascula*).

170. *liberal*, free-spoken.

178. *incapable of*, insensible to, not realising.

179, 180. *indued Unto*, adapted for; literally 'endowed with qualities for that element, i.e. suited to live in the water'—*Schmidt*.

187. For *trick* = 'custom, character, habit' (colloquially 'way'), editors compare 2 *Henry IV.* I. 2. 240, "it was alway yet the trick of our English nation, if they have a good thing, to make it too common."

189. *The woman will be out*. Cf. the description of York's death, *Henry V.* IV. 6. 28—32:

"The pretty and sweet manner of it forced  
Those waters from me which I would have stopp'd;  
But I had not so much of man in me,  
And *all my mother* came into mine eyes  
And gave me up to tears."

191. *dout*, extinguish; literally *do out*; cf. *don* = *do on*, and *doff* = *do off*. To '*dout* a candle,' i.e. put it out, is still a colloquial expression.

## ACT V.

### Scene 1.

*Enter two Clowns*. The introduction of characters like the Grave-diggers (as they are commonly described in criticisms of *Hamlet*), or the Porter in *Macbeth*, II. 2, is intended to give both relief and contrast: the tragic tension is relaxed, and at the same time, for the more reflective observer, the contrast (e.g. of the Clowns' callousness) makes the tragic and pathetic aspect stand out more.

4. *straight*, straightway. *crowner*, the colloquial form of *coroner* (literally 'a crown-officer,' Lat. *coronator*). *finds*; in the legal sense 'brings in a verdict of.'



9. *se offendendo*; the Clown means *se defendendo*, but the phrase is applied to cases of "justifiable homicide," not suicide. As legal authorities the Clowns recall Dogberry and his watch in *Much Ado About Nothing*; and their verdict on Ophelia's death is less merciful than that of the Church or Law.

12. *argal*; the Clown's rendering of Lat. *ergo*, 'therefore.'

16. *will he, nill he*. Compare the common phrase *willy-nilly*; from A.S. *nillan*, short for *ne willan*, 'not to wish.'

21. *crowner's quest law*. Probably Shakespeare is satirising a well-known law-case about a man who was found drowned. A verdict of suicide involved forfeiture of certain property to the Crown, so the lawyers debated "whether *he went to the water or the water came to him*." (F.) *quest*, inquest. Elizabethan law was full of quibbles and fictions, since swept away (see *Shakespeare's England*, 'Law').

25—27. i.e. 'you are right, you say true.' *even Christian*; see G.

38. *confess thyself*; "and be hanged, the Clown would have said if he had not been interrupted. This was a common proverbial sentence. See *Othello*, IV. 1. 39"—*Malone*. (F.)

51. *unyoke*; "your day's work is done"; a way of saying that if he solves this riddle he may then give his wits their well-earned rest. (F.)

The metaphor is obviously appropriate to a labouring-man.

56. *your*; cf. III. 2. 3.

59. *Yaughan*. "Perhaps the name of an actual tavern-keeper in Shakespeare's London. Traces of a German 'Johan' in London have been discovered, and 'Yaughan' would be the natural English way of spelling it"—*Herford*. This "Johan" is supposed to have kept a tavern close to the Globe. According to another view, Yaughan is a common Welsh name, and may have been borne by some Welsh tavern-keeper near the theatre. *stoup*, flagon; a word of Dutch origin (*stoep*).

60. What the Clown sings is a muddled version of a song entitled "The Aged Lover Renounceth Love." Peasants and working folk, says a critic, "in all times and in all climes have sung nonsense."

*To contract*, i.e. in marriage; cf. III. 4. 46.

66, 67. *property*, that which is *proper* to a man, i.e. is his particular quality or vocation; Lat. *proprius*, 'belonging to.'

*of easiness*; adjectival = 'easy to him'; cf. IV. 6. 19 ("of mercy").

75. *jowls*, dashes; cf. *All's Well That Ends Well*, I. 3. 58, 59: "they may jowl horns together, like any deer i' the herd."

76. *jaw-bone*, i.e. of an ass or ox; an ancient tradition.

77. *politician*, a plotter, schemer; in Shakespeare it always has a bad



sense. *o'er-reaches*; used quibblingly in its literal and figurative senses.

86. *mazzard*; colloquial for head, skull; like "sconce" in 97, see G.

87. *revolution*; of Fortune's wheel.

89. *loggats*; a game like ninepins or skittles, played with small logs.

91. *For and*; a common ballad-phrase, equivalent to "and eke" (also). For the redundant *and* of old ballads compare the Song at the end of *Twelfth Night*: "When that I was *and* a little tiny boy."

95. *quiddities...quilllets*; legal sophistries and subtleties. See each word in G. The whole speech illustrates strikingly Shakespeare's partiality for legal terms. He had a good deal to do with litigation (like his father) and the purchase of houses and land.

98. *his action of battery*. So in *Twelfth Night*, after he has been beaten by Sebastian, Sir Andrew says (IV. 1. 36—38): "I'll have an action of battery against him, if there be any law in Illyria." The full legal phrase for unlawful assailing and striking is "assault and battery."

99. Shakespeare himself bought property (New Place) at Stratford about this period of his life.

100, 101. The terms refer to processes connected with the legal transfer or conveyancing of land—always a rather complicated matter. Roughly, *fine*=the "sum of money paid to the lord by his tenant, for permission to alienate or transfer his lands to another": *voucher*, a witness who vouches for, warrants, the tenant's title to the land: *recognizance*, acknowledgment of a debt.

101. *the fine*, the end (*finis*) of; what they all come to.

105. *a pair of indentures*; "contracts in duplicate, the paper or parchment *indented*, so as to be divided into two, which two must fit together in proof of genuineness"—*Dowden*.

106. *conveyances*, deeds of conveyance. *this box*, i.e. the lawyer's coffin, which Hamlet compares mentally with the boxes one sees in a lawyer's office, containing the papers of his different clients.

107. *inheritor*, possessor; cf. I. 1. 92.

111, 112. *which seek out assurance in that*, who put their trust in parchment, i.e. the Law, as if it could ward off the inevitable end. There is a play on *assurance* used as a legal term for the 'conveyance of lands or tenements by deed.'

131. *absolute*, particular, precise; or perhaps 'positive, certain.'

132. *by the card*, with great precision, exactly; a nautical metaphor, *card* meaning here (as in *Macbeth*, I. 3. 17, "i' the shipman's card") the *compass-card*, to which the needle of the compass points.



134, 135. i.e. *all* classes have grown so fastidious, over-precise, that there is no difference between courtier and peasant !

*kibe*, chilblain ; cf. *The Tempest*, II. 1. 276.

141. The fact that the Clown does not know Hamlet shows us how much Hamlet has been the Wittenberg student and recluse.

148, 149. "The 'madness' of Englishmen was a proverbial jest, like the gluttony of the Dutch and the family pride of the Welsh."

174. The name *Yorick* may have been suggested by *Roric*, the name of Hamlet's maternal grandfather in Saxo Grammaticus.

177—184. *Alas, poor Yorick!* Probably a personal allusion by Shakespeare himself. See p. 232. The passage furnishes a vivid picture of the position of intimacy which an Elizabethan jester enjoyed in his master's household.

180, 181. *how abhorred...it is*, i.e. the whole picture of his past familiarity contrasted with the hideous thing in his hands.

*gorge* ; 'stomach,' as we say ; literally 'throat' (F. *gorge*).

187. *favour*, face ; cf. *well-favoured* = 'of good looks, comely,' *Genesis* xxix. 17. First, 'expression of favour, kindness, in the face' ; then, 'the face' itself.

191—194. "Perhaps Shakespeare thought of Alexander's beauty and sweet smell as well as of his conquests. North's *Plutarch*: 'Alexander had a very faire white colour mingled also with red...his skin had a marvellous good favour...his bodie had so sweet a smell' that his apparel 'took thereof a passing delightful savour.' His corpse remained 'many days naked without buriall, in a hote drie countrie,' yet was 'still a cleane and faire corps as could be' (*Life of Alexander*)"—*Dowden*. Montaigne's *Essays* (I. lv.) might be cited to similar effect.

201. *with modesty enough* ; "without exaggeration, which would impair the probability"—*Schmidt*. Cf. II. 2. 422, III. 2. 19.

206—209. The lines are Hamlet's own half-burlesque summary of the situation which his bitter fancy has painted : not a quotation.

206. *Imperious*, imperial (as the Folio reads).

209. *flaw*, blast, gust of wind : see G.

214. *Fordo*, destroy ; see G. *it* ; so all the original editions ; the substitution of *its* is quite indefensible ; see *his* in G.

221. *command*, i.e. of the King. *the order*, the rule of the Church.

223, 224. *for*, instead of. *Shards*, pieces of tile and pottery ; cf. *potsherd*.

225. *crants*, garlands ; Germ. *kranz*, 'a wreath.' "The 'crants' were garlands which it was usual to make of white paper, and to hang up in the church on the occasion of a young girl's funeral...Some of



these were hanging up in Flamborough Church, Yorkshire, as late as 1850" (Hardman, *Our Prayer-Book*, 138). The "crants," therefore, are not identical with the "maiden strewments" (226), i.e. flowers strewn on the grave (239) and coffin. The use of the curious, specifically Teutonic word *crants* is a piece of northern "local colour."

231. *peace-parted*, i.e. departed in peace. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

231—233. *In Memoriam*, XVIII.:

"'Tis well; 'tis something; we may stand  
Where he in English earth is laid,  
And from his ashes may be made  
The violet of his native land;"

and *Omar Khayyám* (XIX., XX.):

"I sometimes think that never blows so red  
The Rose as where some buried Cæsar bled" etc.

An old idea about flowers on a battle-field, e.g. the "Flanders poppies."

249. *the wandering stars*, i.e. the planets; "the *erring* stars" (see I. I. 154, note). Gk. *πλάνητες*, literally 'the wanderers,' hence 'the wandering stars, the planets,' from *πλανᾶσθαι*, 'to wander.'

250, 251. *This is I* etc. A challenge, in answer to his own question "What is he?" (247). This meeting between Hamlet and Laertes leads up to the fencing-match in the next scene.

254. The *spleen* was regarded as the seat of anger.

262. *forty*. Elizabethans often use *forty* to imply an indefinitely large number. Perhaps it gained some mysterious import through the Scripture, e.g. the wanderings of the Israelites, the fast of our Lord.

268. *Woo't*; a contraction of *wouldst thou*, said to be common still in the north of England; here colloquial and contemptuous. (F.)

269. *drink up*, drink large draughts of, drink deep; the *up* having an intensive force. *eisel*, vinegar; see G.; also p. 228.

276. *Ossa*; generally mentioned in connection with *Pelion* (246). "In Greek mythology when the giants made war upon the gods they endeavoured to scale heaven by piling Pelion upon Ossa"; hence a proverbial saying. These mountains were in ancient Thessaly.

280. *couplets*. "The dove lays a pair of eggs at once. The chicks when hatched, are covered with a golden down"—*Herford*. For *disclosed* (= 'hatched') see III. I. 166, note.

285. *dog will have his day*; a proverbial saying.

Probably Laertes who has cursed and sprung at Hamlet is the snarling dog. Hamlet has already contrasted himself with Hercules



(I. 2. 153). Paraphrase, "if Hercules cannot silence dogs, much less I, who am little like that hero"—*Dowden*.

288. *the present push*, an immediate test.

290. *living*, enduring.

### Scene 2.

6. *mutines in the bilboes*, mutineers in fetters. For *mutine* = *mutineer* cf. the verb, III. 4. 83. *bilboes*; see G.

6—11. "'I rashly—praised be rashness for it—*Let us* not think these events casual, but *let us take notice and remember*, that we sometimes succeed by *indiscretion* when we *fail* by *deep plots*'" (Johnson); and let this teach us that Providence is ever superintending and guiding our destinies. The meditative character of the speech accounts for its broken form.

9. From the sense 'to lose life or spirit, to decay, wane' (as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, II. 7. 88, "thy palled fortunes"), *pall* may fairly be interpreted 'fail.'

11. *Rough-hew*. "To hew coarsely, without smoothing, as timber; hence, to give a rough or crude form to, as if by hewing"—*Century Dict.* This compound verb was not limited to any particular craft.

13. *sea-gown*; "a garment with high collar and short sleeves, reaching down to the knee, commonly worn by seamen."

*scarf'd*, thrown loosely about me, like a scarf.

15. *Finger'd*; a euphemism (like "convey") for 'stole, pilfered.'

18. *Their grand commission*; cf. III. 3. 3.

22. *With...such bugs* etc. "With the suggestion of such terrors and perils if I am allowed to live"—*Herford*. Claudius felt himself able to threaten the English king (IV. 3. 57—64). *bugs*; see G.

23. *on the supervise*; cf. 44. *no leisure bated*, without any respite allowed; literally 'no respite of time being deducted.'

30, 31. Under a metaphor drawn (as so often) from his own profession, Shakespeare makes Hamlet say that the operation of his brains was immediate and involuntary: before he could concisely, by the exercise of his will, introduce the matter to his brains and lay the whole case before them, lo! they unconsciously had got to work on its solution. *They*; his "brains," not Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

33—35. *statists*, statesmen; an obsolete use, the word now being limited to the sense 'statistician.' "Most of the great men of Shakespeare's time, whose autographs have been preserved, wrote very bad hands; their secretaries very neat ones." (F.)



36. *yeoman's service*; now a proverbial phrase for 'good, valuable aid'; originally due to the feudal obligation of a yeoman to render his lord military service. "The ancient yeomen were famous for their military valor." Compare Scott's description in *The Lord of the Isles*, VI. xxii., of the English archers at Bannockburn ("Then stepp'd each yeoman forth a pace" etc.).

38. *conjunction*; see IV. 3. 63, note.

41. *wheaten*; symbolising the prosperity of peaceful times.

42. *And stand a comma* etc. "The *comma* is the note of *connection* and continuity of sentences; the *period* [i.e. full-stop] is the note of *abruption* and disjunction" (Johnson). Here *comma* connotes 'connecting-link.'

43. There is a quibble on *as* and *ass*; also on *charge* = (1) 'urgent order,' (2) 'load, burden.'

50. *model*, copy. *that*; pointing to the paper in H.'s hands (26).

52. *Subscribed it, gavet the impression*, i.e. signed it (with the signature of Claudius), and sealed it.

53. *changeling*; the regular word for a child left by the fairies in place of one stolen by them.

56. Horatio's tone may be inferred from Hamlet's reply.

*go to't*; cf. those terrible euphemisms which so distinguish *Macbeth* as a play.

57—62. Is Hamlet's treatment of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz justifiable? that is, justifiable according to the ethics of his time.

58, 59. *their defeat* etc.; their destruction comes from their own meddling in the matter. Hamlet assumes that they were privy, in some degree, to the King's plot against him.

60—62. Hamlet's choice of metaphor is perfect "irony."

*pass*; see IV. 7. 138, note. *opposites*; cf. III. 2. 209.

63. *Does it not...?* Is it not incumbent on me now?

65. *election*. See I. 2. 109, and cf. V. 2. 343, 344.

66. *proper*; emphasising *my*; 'he has plotted against *me*, shall I not return the compliment and requite him?'

79. *bravery*, bravado; compare the ironical use of the adj. *brave*.

81—184. Another break of comedy between two tragedies (31—62, and 266—346): this time, the comedy of wit and irony, and satirical portraiture.

*Osric* is a satire on the Elizabethan courtier. His affected language represents (probably with a touch of caricature such as we get in the characters of Dickens) a style in vogue at Elizabeth's court, especially



among ladies, who were expected, as a matter of course, to be able (in an old writer's phrase) "to parley euphuism." In *Twelfth Night* Viola, disguised as a page from the court, is made to use some most fanciful phrases, and Sir Toby addresses her ironically in a similar style.

83. *water-fly*; an effective symbol of buzzing, busy futility.

87, 88. *let a beast*, i.e. like Claudius. A sarcastic explanation of Osric's high position at court and his wealth.

88. In several passages of Shakespeare (if not always) *chough* must refer to the jackdaw. Twice he uses *chough* in reference to the jackdaw's ability to imitate speech; cf. *All's Well That Ends Well*, IV. 1. 22, "chough's language, gabble enough." Hamlet means to describe Osric as a mere chatterer who has picked up the fashionable jargon, which Hamlet himself imitates contemptuously.

93. *bonnet*; an ordinary Elizabethan word for 'head-gear.' *his*, its.

97, 98. Hamlet was going to say something to the effect *deceives me*, but Osric interrupts in his fussy anxiety to be polite. *complexion*, bodily habit, state; see G.

103, 104. *remember...for mine ease*. These were simply conventional Elizabethan phrases; the one an invitation to a person to put on his hat, the other a polite refusal (= 'really, I prefer to be uncovered'). "The removal of the hat, in Shakespeare's time, even more than now, was regarded as a mark of courtesy." (F.)

106. *differences*, distinguishing qualities; see IV. 5. 164, note.

107. *feelingly*, with a nice sense of his merits.

108. *the card or calendar of gentry*, the very picture and pattern of good breeding; *card* meaning either 'map' or 'compass-card' (V. 1. 132). *calendar*; used figuratively in the sense of 'a guide, directory,' hence 'an example, model.'

108—110. *you shall find in him the continent* etc., "You shall find him containing and comprising every quality which a gentleman would desire to contemplate for imitation"—*Johnson*. *continent*; we might say 'embodiment.' Osric is evidently carrying out the instructions of Claudius (IV. 7. 131—133).

112—114. *to divide him inventorially* etc. Hamlet says in effect: 'separately to compute all the perfections of Laertes would be an arithmetical feat that would make the memory reel; and still, it (the attempt to make the computation) would, after all ("neither"), merely stagger along, so rapidly would these perfections pour into the mind of the enumerator.' Memory, in short, might strain its powers to the utmost, but it would always be outstripped. The whole idea and its



expression (particularly the nautical metaphor) are forced and affected—as Hamlet intends ; in fact, he is parodying Osric's own style. Grammatically the subject of *yaw* (see G.) is *to divide*, but the sense-subject is '*the effort to divide*.'

115, 116. *article*, importance. *infusion*, qualities. *dearth*, preciousness, value ; from *dearth* = '*dearness*, costliness.'

116—118. *his semblable...nothing more*. "To find anything like him we must look into his mirror, and his imitators will appear no more than his shadows"—*Warburton*. (F.) *trace*, follow.

120. *concernancy*, import ; 'what is it all about?'

121. *more rawer*, too raw, i.e. rude.

123, 124. *Is't not possible* etc. Perhaps Horatio means : 'What ! are you beaten at your own game? cannot you understand this fine jargon on (=in) the tongue of another (i.e. when spoken by someone else)? Nay, try again—really, you will be able to' (ironical).

132. *it would not much approve me*. Osric's favourable opinion would be no great testimonial.

135, 136. Sir Thomas Browne says : "no man can judge another, because no man knows himself" (*Religio Medici*, II. 4).

138. *by them*, by people in general. *need*, excellence.

142. The kind of horse called a *barb*, like the kind of pigeon so called, is said to have come from the Barbary States, on the Mediterranean coast of Africa.

143. *imponed* ; commonly taken as Osric's affected pronunciation of *impawned* ('pledged'), which the Quarto reads. (F.)

144. *assigns*, appurtenances. *as*, namely.

145. *hangers*, i.e. "four graduated straps by which the sword was attached to the girdle." (F.)

147. *of very liberal conceit*, elaborately designed and decorated.

149, 150. *I knew you must be* etc. ; I knew you would require some explanation. The metaphor is drawn from the old plan of placing comments on the text in the margin.

151. *The carriages, sir, are the hangers*. A similar affectation is used ironically by Sir Toby to Viola (disguised as a courtier) in *Twelfth Night*, III. 4. 244—"dismount thy tuck," i.e. draw thy sword. A fashionable pastime, as was fencing in Shakespeare's time, tends to develop its own affectations of phrase and terminology.

158—161. Apparently, the contest is to consist of twelve "passes" or bouts, each terminated by the first "hit," but not before : the King backs Hamlet and wagers that Laertes will not beat him by more than



three hits: that is, Hamlet starts with a sort of handicap, in his favour, of three hits: this handicap is described by Osric in his silly affected style as a wager of "twelve for nine," i.e. at the ratio of 12 to 9.

161. *vouchsafe the answer*, accept the challenge. Hamlet purposely misunderstands him; a trick he has used before.

166. *the breathing time*, the time for taking exercise.

176, 177. *This lapwing* etc. Proverbial: "*young Osric*" (186) is compared with a callow and forward fledgeling.

178. *He did comply with* etc.; he must have been a great stickler for ceremonious ways even in his cradle. *comply with*; the sense is the same as in II. 2. 356, viz. 'to treat ceremoniously.'

179. *bevy*; a sporting term for a brood, flock of birds (especially of pheasants); Osric has just been compared with a lapwing.

180, 181. *the tune of the tiple* etc.; the fashionable way of talking etc.: all *à la mode*—voice, language, deportment.

181—183. Paraphrase: 'acquisition of the current affectations of speech and manner (which any fool can pick up—witness Osric himself) enables a man to pass muster very well up to a certain point: it carries him successfully through the utterance of the most foolish and fantastic opinions simply because his affectation serves as a disguise to his barren wits; but (*and* disjunctive) when he comes in contact with some rude person of common sense, the imposture collapses.'

*yesty*, frothy; see G.; the metaphor in "blow," "bubbles." *through and through*; intensive; 'right through.'

*fond*. Some change (needlessly, I think) to *fanned*, the same metaphor as *winnowed*='sifted as by a winnowing-fan,' and so 'over-refined, affected.'

184. *are out*, i.e. soon burst.

186. *attend*, await (F. *attendre*).

193. *In happy time*. Cf. the French *à la bonne heure*.

200—203. Coleridge speaks of "Shakespeare's own fondness for presentiment." A signal illustration is Antonio's "sadness" at the commencement of *The Merchant of Venice*. It is the keynote of his part: "Coming events cast their shadows before." See also *Julius Caesar*, v. 1 (the forebodings of Brutus and Cassius before the battle of Philippi). *gaingiving*, misgiving.

211. *has*, i.e. really possesses. *what he leaves*; meaning, of course, not merely material things, but all that constitutes mortal life. The reading, apart from punctuation, is that of the Folio. Some editors, adopting the Quarto's text with a very slight change, read "since no



man *knows aught* of what he leaves," and interpret "since *no man knows aught* of the state of life which *he leaves*, since he cannot judge what other years may produce, why should he be afraid of *leaving* life betimes?"—*Johnson*. An early death may save him from much unhappiness: "whom the gods love die young."

214—232. Hamlet is carrying out his mother's request (194, 195).

216. *This presence*; pointing to those present; abstract for concrete.

219. *exception*, objection; as in 'to take exception to.'

237, 238. *a voice and precedent of peace*, i.e. an assurance that according to all precedents Laertes may accept what Hamlet has said in self-defence and be reconciled to him. *To keep my name ungored*; cf. Hamlet's words "what a wounded name" etc., 332.

243. The word *foil* (which Hamlet uses with a quibble on *foil*, a blunt sword) means the gold or silver leaf (F. *feuille*, Lat. *folium*), in which a gem is set, in order that its lustre may be thrown into relief (i.e. "stick fiery off").

Often in Shakespeare word-play is the expression of strong emotion, especially bitterness, as in *Richard II.* II. 1. 73—83, where the dying Gaunt puns on his own name ("Old *Gaunt* indeed, and *gaunt* in being old"). Another signal illustration is Lady Macbeth's *gild* and *guilt* (II. 2. 56, 57). Hamlet's feeling is somewhat grim and bitter.

249. *laid the odds on*, i.e. betted on; 'backed' him to win.

253. *likes*; cf. II. 2. 80. *a*, one.

257. *quit in answer* etc., i.e. repay Laertes, in the course of the third bout, any hit Laertes may have scored in the first two rounds. *answer*; in reference to its use as a fencing term = 'the return hit.'

260. "Under pretence of throwing a 'pearl' into the cup, the king may be supposed to drop some poisonous drug into the wine. Hamlet seems to suspect this, when he afterwards discovers the effects of the poison, and tauntingly asks him, 'is thy union here?'" In 314 Hamlet quibbles on *union* (see G.) in its ordinary sense.

262—266. Cf. I. 2. 124—128; I. 4. 8—12. *kettle*, kettle-drum.

275. *He's fat*. This is commonly thought to be a glance at the physique of Richard Burbage, the great Elizabethan actor, who "created the title-part in *Hamlet*" and was "a lifelong friend of Shakespeare" (Lee). He is one of the three theatrical friends mentioned in Shakespeare's will. Applied to Hamlet, *fat* might imply that as a student who led a sedentary life he was out of condition. Compare his own words, II. 2. 287—289. The change *faint* is quite unwarranted.

276. *napkin*, handkerchief; as always in Shakespeare.



286. *pass*, thrust; cf. the noun in 61.

287. *you make a wanton of me*, you play with me as if I were a child (i.e. an opponent unworthy of Laertes's skill).

294. *as a woodcock* etc.; cf. I. 3. 114.

305. *Unbated...practice*; unconsciously repeating the King's own words (IV. 7. 138).

314. *union*; the last of Hamlet's bitter jests: Claudius must "follow" his partner and be *united* to her through the poison!—*Bradley*.

323. *mutes*, i.e. *mutæ personæ*, who are present but take no part in the action; cf. the stage-direction of the "Play-scene" (III. 2. 126).

324. *sergeant*; a sheriff's officer who arrests for debt.

329. *an antique Roman*. Cf. *Macbeth*, v. 8. 1, "Why should I play the Roman fool, and die?" i.e. by committing suicide to avoid capture; and *Julius Cæsar*, v. 3. 89, where Titinius, as he kills himself, says, "this is a Roman's part." In that play Brutus and Cassius, typical Romans, both commit suicide when they see that their cause is hopeless and only disgrace awaits them. Shakespeare's own recognition of the sin of "self-slaughter" is expressed, one may think, by Hamlet (I. 2. 131, 132). For *antique*, see II. 2. 450, note.

345. *occurrents*, occurrences, incidents.

*more and less*, great and small.

346. *solicited*, influenced me; one of the commonest Shakespearian uses of this word is 'to move, prompt, incite.'

*the rest is silence*; cf. *All's Well That Ends Well*, II. 3. 83, "Thanks, sir; all the rest is mute."

Moberly has a fine comment: "To Hamlet silence would come as the most welcome and most gracious of friends, as relief to the action-wearied soul, freedom from conflicting motives, leisure for searching out all problems, release from the toil of finding words for thought; as the one sole language of immortality, the only true utterance of the infinite." (F.)

352. *This quarry*, i.e. the dead bodies, to which Fortinbras points; a hunter's term for the game, alive or dead.

*cries on havoc*, cries out *for* pitiless slaughter in revenge. Seeing the ground strewn with dead, Fortinbras exclaims (as we should expect of him): "Here is indeed a case for the avenger's unsparing hand."

The phrase is a variation on the common expression *cry 'havoc'* = give the signal for indiscriminate slaughter—"no quarter." Cf. *Julius Cæsar*, III. 1. 273, "Cry 'havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war."



353. *toward*, in preparation ; cf. I. I. 77.

355. *dismal* ; a word that has weakened much in significance, like all words that have their origin in superstition ; O.F. *dis mal*, 'unlucky days,' Lat. *dies mali*.

363. *jump* ; cf. I. I. 65.

365—368. A final touch of resemblance to *Julius Cæsar* (Act III.). This is Hamlet's "story" (337) ; cf. also 327, 328.

371. *put on*, instigated.

377. *some rights* ; cf. I. I. 80—104. *of memory*, not forgotten by you.

380. Cf. 344, "he has my dying voice."

381—383. *this same* ; a gesture would make plain the reference. Horatio's concern is for Hamlet's memory and to the last he is practical in his advice. *presently*, at once.

385. *put on*, put to the test ; from the sense 'set to work.'

386. *for his passage*, to mark his passing (i.e. out of this life). Cf. "O let him pass !" — *King Lear*, v. 3. 313.

The end of *Hamlet* is very similar to that of *Macbeth*, where the sceptre passes into the strong grasp of "young Malcolm." Even *King Lear* ends on the notes of duty and optimism : that the world's work must go forward, and that there are men to do it.

In the method of his endings "Shakespeare was with the Greeks. He ends his tragedies by quiet scenes among minor characters." This method, contrasted with the normal modern practice of ringing down the curtain on the climax itself, has the effect of making the tragedy seem more a segment of actual life. After the thunder-peal the stillness.

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"Hamlet is endowed more properly with sentiment than with a character ; it is events alone that push him on ; and accordingly the piece has somewhat the amplification of a novel. But as it is Fate that draws the plan, as the piece proceeds from a deed of terror, and the hero is steadily driven on to a deed of terror, the work is tragic in the highest sense, and admits of no other than a tragic end"—*Goethe*. (F.)



## GLOSSARY.

### *Abbreviations :—*

A.S. = Anglo-Saxon, i.e. English down to about the Conquest.

Middle E. = Middle English, i.e. English from about the Conquest to about 1500.

Elizabethan E. = the English of Shakespeare and his contemporaries (down to about 1650).

O.F. = old French, i.e. till about 1600. F. = modern French.

Germ. = modern German. Gk. = Greek.

Icel. = Icelandic.

Ital. = Italian. Lat. = Latin. Span. = Spanish.

*New E. Dict.* = the *New English Dictionary*.

**NOTE :** In using the Glossary the student should pay very careful attention to the context in which each word occurs.

**abuse** ; literally 'to use amiss,' and so 'to misuse in a particular way,' viz. 'to deceive' (II. 2. 581). O.F. *abuser*, Lat. *abuti*.

**addition**, II. 1. 42, 'title' ; literally "something annexed to a man's name, to show his rank, occupation...or otherwise to distinguish him ; 'style' of address."

**admiration**, I. 2. 191, 'wonder, astonishment.' Elizabethan writers constantly use *admire*, and its derivatives, in the sense of Lat. *admirari*, 'to wonder, be astonished at.' Cf. *Revelation* xvii. 6, "And when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration."

**alarm**, III. 4. 119, 'a summons to take up arms,' from Ital. *all' arme*, 'to arms !'—Lat. *ad illa arma*. Now the other form *alarum*, common in stage-directions, keeps the idea 'a loud summons, call.'

**anchor**, III. 2. 208, 'an anchorite' ; the older form, from A.S. *ancre* = Latin *anchoreta* (also *anchorita*), one of the Latin words that came into A.S. through the spread of Christianity. Gk. *ἀναχωρητής*, 'one who withdraws from the world.'

**anele**, I. 5. 77, 'to give the last anointing, extreme unction, to the dying'; literally 'to pour *oil* on,' from *ele* an older form of *oil* = Lat. *oleum*, Gk. *ελαιον*, 'olive-oil.' We find *anoil* in the same sense.

**antic**, I. 5. 172, 'odd, fantastic'; especially said in Elizabethan E. of carving and stonework. What is old (*antique*) often appears odd (*antic*) to later generations; Lat. *antiquus*.

**arras**, II. 2. 163, III. 3. 28, 'tapestry hangings,' generally with figures and scenes woven in colours; from F. *Arras*, the name of a town in Artois famous for the manufacture of this tapestry.

**aspect**, II. 2. 531. Many words retained in Elizabethan E. the French accent, derived from the original Latin words. Thus Milton wrote "By policy and long *process* of time" (*Paradise Lost*, II. 297); cf. F. *procès*, Lat. *processus*. So Shakespeare scans *access*, *edict*, *exile*, when it suits him.

**batten**, III. 4. 67, 'to grow fat' like an animal; from the same root signifying 'excellence, prosperity,' as *better*, *best*, Germ. *besser*. Cf. Herrick, *Content in the Country*:

"We eate our own, and batten more,  
Because we feed on no man's score."

**beaver**, I. 2. 229, 'the visor of a helmet,' i.e. the movable part which came down over the face and which the wearer could lift easily when he wanted to cool himself or eat and drink. F. *bavière*, 'a bib,' also 'a visor' (shaped like a bib).

**beetle**, I. 4. 71, 'to overhang, to jut over'; as in *beetle-browed*, i.e. with shaggy, prominent eyebrows. The origin of *beetle* in this sense probably lies in the comparison between such brows and the short tufted antennæ of some species of *beetle*.

**beteem**, I. 2. 141; 'to allow, permit'; from the literal sense 'to think fit or proper.'

**betimes**; 'in good time, before it is too late'; hence (V. 2. 212) 'early, soon.' Formed from *betime*, literally 'by the time that.'

**bilboes**, V. 2. 6, 'irons, fetters.' "A *bilbo* was a long iron bar, furnished with sliding shackles to confine the ankles of prisoners, and a lock by which to fix one end of the bar to the floor or ground." Span. *Bilbao*, famous for its iron and steel; cf. *bilbo*, 'a sword, a blade of *Bilbao* or (as the English commonly said) *Bilboa*.'

**bisson**, II. 2. 486, 'blinding'; properly 'purblind, dim-sighted,' as in *Coriolanus*, II. 1. 70; of uncertain origin.

**blench**, II. 2. 575; a northern form of *blenk*, 'to start aside, swerve, shy (like a horse), flinch'; allied to *blink*, and quite distinct in origin



from, though confused in use with, *blanch*, 'to grow white' (F. *blanc*). The idea is 'to flinch like shifty, *blinking* eyes.'

**botch**, IV. 5. 10, 'to patch.' A *botch* is a 'flaw or blemish resulting from unskilful workmanship'; 'a clumsy patch; a bungled piece of work.' Perhaps akin to *patch*.

**bruit**, I. 2. 127, 'to report, noise abroad,' as in I *Henry VI.* II. 3. 68, "I find thou art no less than fame hath bruited." F. *bruit*, 'noise.' "Much bruit, little fruit" (Bacon, *Essay* 54).

**bug**, V. 2. 22; "an object of terror, usually an imaginary one; a bugbear, hobgoblin, bogy; a scarecrow"—*New E. Dict.* It quotes Coverdale (1535), *Psalm* xci. 5, "Thou shalt not nede to be afrayed for any bugges by night" (Authorised Version "the terror"). *Bugbear* means literally a spectre or goblin in the shape of a bear.

**canker**, I. 3. 38, 'the worm that preys on blossoms, especially roses.' The wild or 'dog' rose is especially subject to this disease: hence in Shakespeare *canker* (or *canker-bloom*) sometimes means a wild-rose. Lat. *cancer*, 'a crab'—also an 'eating tumour.'

**carouse**, V. 2. 277, 'to drink'; originally an adverb used in the phrase 'to drink *carouse*' = 'all out'; formed, like F. *carousser*, from German *gar-aus*, 'quite out,' i.e. with no liquor left in the glass. It was a stock piece of Elizabethan satire that the Germans were great toppers.

**cautel**, I. 3. 15, 'deceit, trickiness'; cf. *cautelous*, 'deceitful, not to be trusted,' in *Julius Caesar*, II. 1. 129. Sometimes *cautel* has the milder sense 'caution, heedfulness,' or 'a precaution' (Lat. *cautela*).

**caviare**, II. 2. 418. "The roe of the sturgeon and other large fish obtained from lakes and rivers of the east of Europe, pressed and salted, and eaten as a relish...The circumstance that *caviar* is generally unpalatable to those who have not acquired a taste for it, is referred to by Shakespeare in a phrase which has become one of the commonplaces of literary quotation and allusion"—*New E. Dict.*

*Caviar* was, and is, imported chiefly from Russia, our trade with which began in Elizabeth's reign.

**censure**. The original sense, common in Elizabethan E., of the verb was 'to judge' = Lat. *censere*; so *censure* = 'judgment, opinion' (I. 3. 68). As we are apt to judge others unfavourably, *censure* comes to mean 'blame.' Words tend to deteriorate in sense.

**cerement**, I. 4. 48; sometimes called a *cerecloth*, i.e. a cloth smeared with or dipped in melted wax (Lat. *cera*), a waxed winding-sheet.

**cheer**. Properly (1) 'countenance'; Late Lat. *cara*, 'face' = Gk. *κῆρα*, 'head.' Then (2) 'spirits,' especially high spirits (III. 2. 153), as



the face reflects the feelings. Then (3) that which promotes good spirits, i.e. 'food, entertainment, fare' (III. 2. 208).

**chopine**, II. 2. 409; from a Spanish word meaning 'a woman's high cork shoes.' The fashion of wearing these shoes prevailed in Italy, especially at Venice, as the accounts of Elizabethan travellers show. The custom, however, and the word really came from Spain, and were imported into Italy and from Italy into England.

**chough**, v. 2. 88; applied formerly to any sort of crow, but especially the jackdaw (as still in Devonshire). Now *chough* is used strictly of the Cornish red-legged crow, almost extinct.

**churlish**, v. 1. 233, 'rough, rude'; from *churl*, 'a boorish fellow,' A.S. *ceorl*, 'a countryman, peasant.'

**clepe**, I. 4. 19, 'to call.' The word, which is very common in Chaucer and pre-Shakespearian writers, is most familiar now through Milton's lines (*L'Allegro*, II, 12):

"But come, thou Goddess fair and free,  
In Heaven ycleped Euphrosyne."

**coil**, III. 1. 67, 'turmoil'; formerly common, especially in the Elizabethan phrase *to keep a coil* = 'to make a fuss, to make much ado.' Cf. *King John*, II. 165, "I am not worth this coil that's made for me."

**complexion**, I. 4. 27; this was an old physiological term for 'the combination of the four "humours" of the body in a certain proportion'; hence 'the disposition, temperament,' arising from this combination.

**comply**, II. 2. 356, v. 2. 178. *Comply with* had a rare Elizabethan sense, 'to observe the formalities of courtesy and politeness towards'; imitated from a similar Italian phrase. The literal idea in *comply* and *compliment* is 'to fill up (Lat. *complere*) what is wanted, to satisfy the demands of courtesy.'

**cote**, II. 2. 307, 'to overtake, pass'; properly a sporting term which signifies that when two greyhounds are coursing a hare, one passes the other so as to give the hare a turn; hence *cote* = 'to pass by, go beyond, outstrip.' Perhaps same as *coast*, 'to skirt.'

**cousin**; used by Shakespeare of any degree of kinship (except the first, as father, son); e.g. = 'nephew' (I. 2. 64). Sometimes it is merely a friendly title "given by princes to other princes and distinguished noblemen."

**cozen**, III. 4. 77. According to the common (but not certain) explanation, to *cozen* a man is to pretend to be his *cousin* for the purpose of getting something out of him; whence 'to cheat.' There was an old phrase 'to make a *cousin* of' = 'to beguile, hoax.'



**cue**, II. 2. 537 ; properly the 'catchword' which is a signal to an actor to come on to the stage and speak. The figurative use is well shown by *Othello*, I. 2. 83, 84 :

"Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it  
Without a prompter."

Perhaps from F. *queue*, 'a tail,' Lat. *cauda*, because an actor's *cue* is the *tail*-end of the last speech.

**dear**. The general Elizabethan sense of *dear* (cognate with Germ. *theuer*) is 'that which affects us closely, whether in a good or bad way.' Cf. "my dear soul," III. 2. 61, i.e. inmost, vital. In Shakespeare the word often has a bad sense, e.g. 'bitter (I. 2. 181), grievous, heart-felt.' Cf. *Richard II.* I. 3. 151, "The dateless limit of thy dear exile."

**dirge**, I. 2. 12 ; "originally *dirige*, the first word of the Latin antiphon *Dirige, Domine, Deus meus, in conspectu tuo viam meam*, Direct, O Lord, my God, my way in thy sight,' taken from Psalm v. 8." The word *dirige*, being the first in the burial-service of the Roman Catholic liturgy, gave the name *Dirige* to the whole service. Hence 'a funeral mourning, a lament.'

**ducat** ; a coin formerly worth in England about 6s. 8d. O.F. *ducat*, from Italian *ducato*, so called because first coined in the *duchy* (Lat. *ducatus*) of Apulia, with the words "sit tibi, Christe, datus, quem tu regis, iste *ducatus*."

**eisel**, v. 1. 269, 'vinegar' ; through O.F. from Late Lat. *acetillum*, a diminutive of *acetum*, 'vinegar.' *Eisel* is the word commonly used for "vinegar" in the narrative of the Crucifixion in old translations of the New Testament, and in religious works like the *Cursor Mundi* (about 1300), which has : "And bed [offered] him galle and eysel to drynke." The expression "as sour as eysel" appears to have been current in Lancashire till recent times.

**escote**, II. 2. 334, 'to maintain' ; connected with *scot*, 'a contribution,' as in the phrase *scot and lot*, and the compound *scot-free* ; literally 'a shot, a contribution,' i.e. 'something *shot* into a common fund.'

**even Christian**, v. 1. 27, 'fellow Christian.' This use of *even* was common in Old English, especially in early theological works ; similar compounds being *even-disciple*, *even-knight* ('a fellow-soldier'), *even-next* ('a neighbour'), *even-servant*, *even-worker*.

**eyas**, II. 2. 327 ; literally 'a nestling, a young hawk just taken from the nest.' Spenser compares the Red Crosse Knight arising from the Well of Life to an "eyas hauke" (*The Faerie Queene*, II. 11. 34).



Etymologically *an eyas* = *a nias*; O.F. *niais*, 'a nestling,' Lat. *nidax*, from *nidus*, 'a nest.' Cf. the same formation in *adder*, *apron*.

**eyrie**, II. 2. 327, 'a brood of nestlings'; properly 'a nest' of an eagle or hawk. Correctly written *aery*; from Low Lat. *area*, 'nest.' The spelling *eyry* or *eyrie* is due to confusion with Middle E. *ey*, 'an egg,' as though *eyry* meant a place for eggs.

**fee**, I. 4. 65, 'value'; much used as a legal term for the possession or tenure of land (IV. 4. 22). Thus *fee-simple* = hereditary land, held without any conditions and 'for ever.' A.S. *feoh* (cf. Germ. *vieh*) meant (1) 'cattle,' (2) 'property'—cattle being the chief kind of property in a primitive state of society. Cf. Lat. *pecunia* from *pecus*.

**flaw**, V. I. 209, 'a sudden gust of wind.' Cf. Tennyson, *Marriage of Geraint*, "Like flaws in summer laying lusty corn." The same as *flaw*, 'a crack' = Swedish *flaga*, 'a crack,' also 'blast of wind.' Perhaps 'sudden burst' is the radical notion.

**fond**, I. 5. 99, 'foolish': its old meaning. Cf. *King Lear*, IV. 7. 60, "I am a very foolish fond old man." Hence *fondly* = 'foolishly.'

**fordo**, II. I. 97, V. I. 214 = 'to destroy'; literally = 'to do away with.' The prefix *for-* here has its privative force = 'away.' In *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, V. 381 ("All with weary task *fordone*"), the meaning is 'to exhaust,' *for-* having an intensive force; cf. 'done up.'

**fret**, II. 2. 292, 'to variegate as with *frets*.' A *fret* was a small band; O.F. *frete*, 'an iron band' = Ital. *ferrata*, 'an iron grating' (Lat. *ferrum*, 'iron'). "*Fret-work*" was specially used of a kind of pattern for the roofs of halls (e.g. the Egyptian key pattern), formed by small gilt bands or *frets* intersecting each other at right angles.

**goblin**, I. 4. 40; a mischievous spirit or elf, like Ariel in *The Tempest* or Puck in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, that plays tricks. Low Lat. *gobelinus*, a diminutive of Low Lat. *cobalus*, 'a sprite' = Gk. *κόβαλος*, 'a rogue.'

**grained**. The noun *grain* is from Lat. *granum*, the Low Lat. word = the classical Lat. *coccum*, which signified the scarlet dye made from the cochineal insect found on the scarlet oak in Spain and other Mediterranean countries. Probably this cochineal insect (*coccum*) got to be called *granum* simply because it looked like a grain or seed and was thought to be one. *Grain* was a 'fast' colour, i.e. one that would not fade or wash out. Thus we get the idea 'dyed through and through, deeply ingrained' (III. 4. 90).



**grizzled**, I. 2. 239, 'greyish, streaked with grey'; cf. F. *gris*; distinct from *grisly* = 'terrible,' A.S. *grīslīc*, cognate with Germ. *grässlich*, 'terrible.'

**handsaw**, II. 2. 363; supposed to be a corruption of *heronshaw*, 'a heron,' properly 'a young heron,' O.F. *heronnneau*. Later *heronshaw* came to mean 'a heronry,' from a wrong notion that it was compounded of *heron* + *shaw*, 'a wood.'

'Popular etymology,' i.e. common and incorrect notions as to the origin of words, influences the form often. Cf. *cray-fish*, where *-fish* is a corruption of *-visse* in F. *écrevisse*. So *cutlass* (F. *coutelas*) got corrupted into *curtle-axe* from a similarity of sound, which made people think the weapon was a sort of *axe*. 'Force-meat' or stuffing is really 'farced-meat,' F. *farcier*, 'to stuff,' Lat. *farcire*, but the latter sounds as if it meant 'meat forced in,' and was spelt accordingly.

**harbinger**, I. 1. 122, 'a forerunner'; its original sense was 'an officer who went in advance of an army (cf. Germ. *heer*) or prince to make provision for the night's camping or shelter' (*harbourage*).

**hearsed**. Derived from Lat. *hirpex*, 'a harrow,' *hearse* originally meant a triangular frame shaped like a harrow, for holding lights at a church service, especially in Holy Week. Later, *hearse* was applied to the illumination at a funeral, and then to almost everything connected with a funeral, e.g. the coffin (I. 4. 47), the bier, the grave.

**hent**, III. 3. 88, 'seizure, grasp'; from an old verb *hent* = 'to take, seize.' Cf. Middle E. *henter*, 'a thief.'

**hermit**; literally one who dwells in a desert, as did the hermits of old; Gk. *ἐρημίτης*, from *ἐρημία*, 'a desert.'

**his**; this was the ordinary *neuter* (as well as masculine) possessive pronoun in Middle E. and remained so in Elizabethan E. Cf. *Genesis* iii. 15, "it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise *his* heel." There was also a use, not common, of *it* as a possessive, though uninflected (see I. 2. 215); especially in the phrase *it own* (V. 1. 214). Cf. *The Tempest*, II. 1. 163, "of it own kind," and the Bible of 1611 in *Leviticus* xxv. 5, "of it owne accord."

Then from the possessive use of *it* uninflected there arose, about the close of the 16th century, the inflected form *its*, in which *-s* is the usual possessive inflection, as in *his*. This new form *its* came into use slowly. There are no instances of *its* in Spenser or the Bible (1611), and only three in Milton's poetical works (*Paradise Lost*, I. 254, IV. 813, *Nativity Ode*, 106). *Its* does not occur in any extant work of Shake-



speare printed prior to his death : hence it seems not improbable that the nine instances in the 1st Folio (five in a single play, *The Winter's Tale*) were due to the editors or printers.

**housel**, I. 5. 77 ; A.S. *hūsel*, 'the Eucharist,' originally 'sacrifice,' from an Aryan root signifying 'holy, consecrated.' Cf. "*houstring* fire" = 'sacramental' in *The Faerie Queene*, I. 12. 37.

**humour**, II. 2. 12. It was an old belief that all existing things consist of four *elements* ; that in the human body these *elements* appear as four *humours*—fire=choler, water=phlegm, earth=melancholy or black bile, air=blood ; and that a man's 'temperament' or nature depends upon the way in which these *humours* are 'tempered,' i.e. mixed, in him. So in Elizabethan E. *humour* often has a wider sense than now, e.g. 'prevailing temper, disposition.' Compare the titles of Ben Jonson's comedies, *Every Man in his Humour* and *Every Man out of his Humour*. See *complexion*.

**influence**, I. 1. 119 ; Lat. *influentia*, 'a flowing upon,' Lat. *in* + *fluere*. It was an astrological term applied to the power over the earth, men's characters, fortunes etc., which was supposed to descend from the celestial bodies. Cf. "planetary influence," *King Lear*, I. 2. 136. Other terms due to astrology are 'disaster' (Lat. *astrum*, 'a star'), 'ill-starred,' 'jovial,' 'saturnine.'

**lazar**, 'a beggar afflicted with disease,' especially leprosy like the beggar Lazarus, in the parable (*Luke* xvi. 19) : hence **lazar-like**, 'resembling leprosy' (I. 5. 72).

**learn** ; the word had both meanings, 'to learn' (in the modern sense) and 'to teach.' The latter was growing obsolete ; we find it in the Prayer-Book Version of the *Psalms* (e.g. in xxv. 4, "Lead me forth in thy truth, and learn me"), but not in the Authorised Version of the Bible (1611). Here (v. 2. 9) the Folio (1623) has *teach*.

**let**, I. 4. 85, 'to hinder' ; A.S. *lettan*, 'to hinder,' literally 'to make late.' Cf. *Romans* i. 13, "oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, but was let hitherto," i.e. prevented.

**luxury**, I. 5. 83 ; Shakespeare always uses *luxury* = 'lust,' the sense of *luxuria* in Late Lat. ; and **luxurious** = 'lustful,' *luxuriosus*.

**mallecho**, III. 2. 128, 'mischief' ; from a Spanish word which in sense and origin is exactly the same as *malefaction*.

**marry**, corrupted from the name of the 'Virgin Mary' ; cf. "Lady" and "by'r lady" = 'by our Lady,' i.e. the Virgin. Such expressions dated from the pre-Reformation times in England. The common meanings of *marry* are 'indeed, to be sure,' and 'why !'



**mazzard**, v. i. 86; a colloquial word for 'head, skull,' so called from the resemblance in shape to a *mazer* or drinking-bowl made of maple-wood (Icelandic *mösurr*, 'a maple').

**mere**, 'absolute, utter.' Cf. "the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet," i.e. complete destruction, *Othello*, II. 2. 3, 4. Lat. *merus*, 'pure, unmixed.' So **merely** = 'absolutely, entirely' (I. 2. 137).

**mettle**, I. i. 96, 'disposition, temper'; only another spelling of *metal* (Lat. *metallum*).

**micling**, III. 2. 128, 'skulking, sneaking, stealthy'; from an old verb = 'to prowl about like a thief, to skulk like a pilferer'; whence a milder sense 'to play truant,' e.g. from school. The verb *mic* and the noun *micler* are still current with this sense 'playing truant' in the dialects of various counties. Cf. also the colloquialism 'to *mouch* about,' i.e. 'to prowl about,' 'to loaf.'

**mobled**, II. 2. 482. The verb *moble* is still current among country-folk in Shakespeare's own county and in Shropshire, in the sense: "To muffle the head and shoulders in warm wraps [such as a *mop*-cap]; to put on an abundance of warm wraps; generally with *up*"—e.g. "Yo' mun *moble* yourself well up, it's a despart, raw, cowl night."

**mountebank**, IV. 7. 141, 'quack doctor'; literally 'one who *mounts a bench*, to proclaim the merits of his medicines etc.,' Ital. *montambanco*. Cf. Bacon's *Essay Of Boldnesse*; "Surely, as there are Mountebanques for the Naturall Body, so are there Mountebanques for the Politique Body."

**naught**, III. 2. 136, = *naughty*, which is always used by Shakespeare = 'bad, good for *naught*'; cf. *The Merchant of Venice*, v. 91, "So shines a *good* deed in a *naughty* world." Cf. *Proverbs* vi. 12, "A *naughty* person, a wicked man." The old neg. *ne* + *aught*.

**nonce**, IV. 7. 160; literally 'for the once,' i.e. 'for this occasion only.' The *n* represents the old datival termination of the definite article, and got tacked on to the noun for euphony, by the process called *prosthesis*, like the *n* in *an ewt* = *a newt*.

**noyance**, III. 3. 13, 'hurt, harm'; short for *annoyance*. Shakespeare always uses *annoy* in the strong sense 'to hurt, harm.'

**orchard**, I. 5. 35, in Shakespeare commonly, if not always, = 'garden.' This was the original sense, *orchard* being = *wort-yard*, 'herb-garden.' Cf. Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, II. 288, "the orchard of th' Hesperides," i.e. the 'garden.'

**ore**, IV. i. 25, 'gold'; often used thus by Elizabethan writers, as if connected with Lat. *aurum*. It is, however, a Teutonic word = 'unwrought metal.'



**or ere**, I. 2. 147, 'before'; really *or* and *ere* are the same word = A.S. *ær*, 'before.' Perhaps *or ere* arose through confusion with *or ever*, people supposing wrongly that *ere* was put for *e'er* (cf. *Proverbs* viii. 23).

**paddock**, III. 4. 189, 'a toad.' *Pad* was a common word for 'toad'; old writers speak of *pad-stool* and *paddock-stool* for 'toad-stool.' Cf. Herrick's "Another Grace for a Child" in *Noble Numbers*:

"Here a little child I stand  
Heaving up my either hand,  
Cold as paddocks though they be,  
Here I lift them up to Thee."

**passion**, II. 2. 498, 528; any strong emotion, feeling, especially great grief; cf. *King Lear*, V. 3. 198, "'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief." Lat. *passio*, 'suffering, feeling,' from *pati*, 'to suffer.'

**pat**, III. 3. 73; the notion is 'exactly,' i.e. exactly as one could wish or has said; from *pat*, 'to strike.' It represents "the sound of something thrown down upon the ground, as marking the exact moment of a thing being done"—just as "*smack* represents the sound of a blow, or of a sudden fall, in such expressions as knocking a thing *smack* down, cutting it *smack* off."

**plurisy**, IV. 7. 117. Elizabethan writers use both *plurisy* (from Lat. *plus*, *pluris*, 'more') and *pleurisy* to mean 'plethora, redundancy of blood'—hence 'surfeit, superabundance.' Of course, *pleurisy* now means quite a different ailment, viz. 'inflammation of the *pleura* or membrane which covers the lungs,' and has quite a different origin, viz. Gk. *πλευρά*, 'a rib, side.'

**porpentine**, I. 5. 20; a corruption of *porkepin*, the older form of *porcupine* (Lat. *porcus* + *spina*, 'a thorn').

**proof**, II. 2. 471. F. *preuve*, Low Lat. *proba*, 'a test,' specially used of impenetrable armour, meaning the armour itself, or its resisting power. All steel used for armour, swords, etc. is tested.

**quaintly**, II. 1. 26, 'artfully, skilfully.' The original sense of *quaint* (= O.F. *coint*, Lat. *cognitus*, 'well-known') was 'knowing, wise.' But through a false notion that it came from Lat. *comptus*, 'trimmed, adorned,' *quaint* got the sense 'fine, neat, dainty'—which it has always in Shakespeare. Cf. "my quaint Ariel" (said by Prospero), *The Tempest*, I. 2. 317. Perhaps *quaint* = 'odd, eccentric' arose from the notion 'too trim, over-fine.'

**quarry**, V. 2. 352, 'a heap of slaughtered game'; a hunting-term. O.F. *cuiree*, the intestines of a slain animal, the part given to the hounds; so called because wrapped in the skin (F. *cuir*, 'a skin, hide,' from Lat. *corium*, 'hide').



**quiddity**, v. i. 95, 'a sophistry, cavil'; Late Lat. *quidditas*, 'the nature of a thing,' literally 'what (*quid*) is it?' The word owes its sense to the sophistical definitions and distinctions drawn by the mediæval schoolmen.

**quietus**, III. i. 75; a legal term for 'a discharge from a debt,' short for Late Lat. *quietus est*, 'he is discharged, i.e. acquitted.' Cf. a fine old saying: "Death is a Christian's *quietus est*, it is his discharge from all trouble and misery." To be *quit* of a debt is to be *quiet* from it.

**quillet**, v. i. 95, 'a quibble in argument, a legal subtlety'; short for Lat. *quidlibet*, 'anything you please.'

**rack**, II. 2. 465; cf. *The Tempest*, IV. 156. Icelandic *rek*, 'drift, a thing drifted,' from the root 'to drive' which we get in *wreck*.

**rede**, or **read**, I. 3. 50, 'counsel, advice.' A.S. *rædan*, 'to counsel, consult, interpret, read'; cf. Germ. *rathen*, 'to advise.' The verb is common in Spenser (sometimes in the compound form *aread*), in such senses as 'to interpret, discern, advise, consider.'

**rheum**; 'moisture,' 'flux,' e.g. tears (II. 2. 486). In *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, II. i. 105, "*rheumatic* diseases" are those which produce a flux or flowing, e.g. catarrhs, coughs, cold. Gk. *ῥεῦμα*, 'a flowing,' from *ῥέειν*, 'to flow.'

**rival**, I. i. 13, 'partner in, sharer of.' Lat. *rivalis*, literally 'one who uses the same brook (*rivus*) as another,' e.g. for irrigating land; hence (from their disputes about the water) 'a competitor.'

**romage**, I. i. 107, 'bustle, turmoil'; the same as *rummage*. To *rummage* is to search the *roomage* or stowage in a ship (from *room*, 'space'); hence the notion 'bustle, turmoil.'

**sans**, III. 4. 79. It is thought that F. *sans* (Lat. *sine* 'without') was used originally in English only with words of French origin, and then with any words, as in *As You Like It*, II. 7. 166, "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing."

**sconce**, 'a fortification, bulwark'; hence 'a protection for the head, helmet'; and so (contemptuously) 'the head' itself (v. i. 97). O.F. *esconse*, 'a hiding-place,' Lat. *absconsa* (from *abscondere*, 'to hide').

**scrimmer**, IV. 7. 100, 'a fencer'; F. *escrimeur*. The root is Teutonic—cf. Germ. *schirm*, 'a screen, shelter, protection'—and the radical idea is 'to fight under cover, behind shelter.' Thus 'to *skirmish*' (a cognate word) is strictly 'to advance under cover.'

**secure**, I. 5. 61. Elizabethan writers often use the adjective *secure*=Lat. *securus*, 'careless, free from fear or suspicion'; especially to imply over-confidence, a false sense of safety, want of caution. Cf. Fletcher's quibbling lines:



"To secure yourselves from these,  
Be not too secure in ease."

Ben Jonson wrote "Men may *securely* sin, but *safely* never."

**shrewdly**; used by Shakespeare unfavourably with an intensive force = 'very,' 'quite,' and so in I. 4. 1 = 'keenly, piercingly.' This use comes from *shrewd* (the past participle of *schrewen*, 'to curse') in its old sense 'bad'; cf. *King John*, V. 5. 14, "Ah, foul shrewd news! beshrew thy very heart!"

**simple**, IV. 7. 144, 'a single ingredient in a compound, especially in a compounded medicine'; hence a 'medicinal herb.'

**sledged**, I. 1. 63. Skeat says that the original form of the noun (cognate with *slide*) was *sled*, and that *sledge* "is a corrupt form, apparently due to *sleds*, pl. of *sled*."

**sliver**, IV. 7. 173, 'a small branch'; we have the verb = 'to tear off' (A.S. *slifan*, 'to cleave') in *King Lear*, IV. 2. 34, 35:

"She that herself will sliver and disbranch

From her material sap, perforce must wither."

**spill**, IV. 5. 20, 'to destroy'; the old sense, as in *King Lear*, III. 2. 8, "Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once" (i.e. destroy all the seeds of life).

**sterling**, I. 3. 106, 'of full value, current,' the noun used as adjective, as in *Richard II.* IV. 1. 264, 265: "An if my word be sterling yet in England." "A *sterling* coin [was] named from the *Esterling's* (i.e. easterlings, men of the east); this was a name for the Hanse merchants in London, temp. Henry III."

**stuck**, IV. 7. 161, 'thrust'; Ital. *stoccata*. Elizabethan writers also use the forms *stock*, *stoccado* and *stoccata*.

**take**, I. 1. 163. In Elizabethan E. *take* is used of the malignant influence of supernatural powers. As this influence was supposed to manifest itself especially in the form of disease, *take* often has the notion 'to strike with disease, to infect'—as perhaps here. Cf. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, IV. 3. 32, "And there he blasts the tree and takes the cattle."

**tax**, I. 4. 18, 'to censure, reproach'; cf. *Much Ado About Nothing*, I. 1. 46, "you tax Signior Benedick too much." Now more common in 'to tax with' an offence (Lat. *taxare*, 'to charge'). In *As You Like It*, I. 2. 91, we have *taxation* = 'censure, satire.'

**tithe**, III. 4. 96, 'tenth part'; its relation to A.S. *tēoða*, 'tenth,' is more apparent in the Middle E. form *tethe* (also written *tithe*).

**toy**, IV. 5. 18, 'a worthless thing, a trifle.' Cf. 2 *Henry IV.*



II. 4. 183, "Shall we fall foul for toys?" i.e. quarrel about trifles. So in *Lucrece*, 214, "Who sells eternity to get a toy?" Hence 'an idle fancy, a mere whim' (I. 3. 6).

**union**, V. 2. 260, 'a large pearl.' "Pliny says that the name *unio* [literally 'oneness,' i.e. uniqueness] was an invention of the fine gentlemen of Rome, to denote only such pearls as could not be matched (i.e. were *unique*)"—*Nares*.

**vail**, I. 2. 70, 'to lower'; especially to lower a cap or mast as a sign of respect. F. *avalier*, 'to put down,' from Lat. *ad* + *vallem*, 'to the valley'; cf. the opposite word *paramount*, literally 'at the top,' = *per* + *ad montem*, 'up to the mountain.'

**valanced**, II. 2. 406; from *valance* = 'a fringe of drapery,' now limited to a part of the bed-hangings. Probably so called from *Valence* in France, near Lyons (famous for silks). Lat. *Valentia*, a name given to several towns strong (Lat. *valens*) by natural position.

**wassail**, I. 4. 9; the old northern English *wes heil*, 'be whole' = the imperative of *wesan*, 'to be' + *heil*, cognate with *whole* and *hale*. Originally *wassail* was a salutation, like the German use of *prosit!* ('may it benefit you'), used in drinking a man's health; then it came to mean 'a drinking, carousing, revel.' The '*wassail*-bowl' was a great feature of the old Christmas feasting.

**weal**, III. 3. 14, 'welfare, prosperity'; cf. *wealth*, used formerly in the same sense. Literally 'a state of being *well*,' according to one's *will* or wish.

**weed**, IV. 7. 80, 'garments, dress'; A.S. *wæd*, 'garment.' Commonly in the plural. Now limited to the phrase 'widow's weeds,' except in poetry; cf. Tennyson, "In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er" (*In Memoriam*, v.).

**yaw**, V. 2. 113, 'to go unsteadily, as a ship.' A word of Dutch origin, cognate with *yacht*. A good many sea-words come from the Dutch, a near and sea-faring people; cf. *avast*, *boom* (of a harbour), *cruise*, *deck*, *skipper*, *sloop*, *smack*, *yawl*.

**yeoman**, V. 2. 36; literally 'a freeholder'; then, from his liability to render service to his feudal lord, 'a servant, retainer,' as in Chaucer. The first part of the word probably means 'village' or 'country.'

**yesty**, V. 2. 181, 'foamy, frothy'; a variant form of *yeasty*. Cf. Tennyson, *The Sailor Boy*,

"The sands and yeasty surges mix  
In caves about the dreary bay,  
And on thy ribs the limpet sticks,  
And in thy heart the scrawl shall play."



## APPENDIX.

*Hamlet*, I. 1. 63:

“the sledded Polacks.”

The original editions have *pollax* and *Pollax*; it is generally thought that each stands for *Polacks*, the plural of *Polack* (‘a Pole’), which we get in II. 2. 63, 75. The fact that so much is said in the play about the relation of the three northern countries—Denmark, Norway and Poland—makes it probable that some reference to Poland is intended here. And *sledded* (describing a national custom) may be regarded as a piece of northern “local colour.”

The suggestion *his leaded pole-axe* is a needless change; moreover it presents a rather trivial incident.

*Hamlet*, I. 4. 36—38:

“the dram of eale

Doth all the noble substance of a doubt  
To his own scandal.”

We cannot get any tolerable sense out of the words as they stand, though the general drift of the passage is made clear by the context. Perhaps the best emendation is *often dout*, thus: ‘the small measure of evil (*e’il=eale*) doth often efface or extinguish (like a candle) all the good element and bring it to its own ruin or disgrace.’ *Often* would repeat *oft* in line 23. The whole passage, 17—38, is absent in the Folio; no doubt, cut out from the acting-version on account of its involved character, difficult for any audience to follow.

*Hamlet*, IV. 3. 47:

“a cherub that sees them.”

According to a mediæval belief the Heavenly beings were divided into nine Orders or Choirs—such as Seraphim, Cherubim, Angels, Archangels, Principalities—and each Order possessed some special quality. The Cherubim had a wondrous power of vision, being “full of eyes round about them” (*Ezekiel* i. 18, x. 12). In several places where Shakespeare refers to them there is the notion of *seeing*; cf. *The*



*Merchant of Venice*, v. 1. 62, "the young-eyed cherubins," i.e. with sight ever young, hence 'keen, undimmed.'

This division of the Heavenly beings into Orders originated in St Paul's words in *Ephes.* i. 21, *Coloss.* i. 16. It was very familiar to people in the Middle Ages, and Elizabethan writers often refer to it. Milton made it the basis of the whole angelical system of *Paradise Lost*. Note that Shakespeare uses *cherub* as the singular of *cherubins* (correctly, *cherubim*), i.e. to mean 'a heavenly spirit'; not, that is, with our idea of a 'cherub.'

*Hamlet*, v. 1. 269:

"Woo't drink up eisel?"

For *eisel* the 1st Quarto has *vessels*; all the other Quartos "Esill" (not in italics); all the Folios *Esile* (in italics); and there can be no doubt that these two forms represent an old word *eisel* or *eysel* = 'vinegar,' which Shakespeare uses in *Sonnet* 111. That it was archaic even in Shakespeare's time and therefore unfamiliar to his printers may be inferred from the fact that the *New English Dictionary* gives no instance of its use later than 1634.

*Drink up eisel* and *eat a crocodile* are similar fantastic ideas, and in making Hamlet ask these ironical questions Shakespeare alludes to a special Elizabethan custom. "It was a fashion of the gallants of Shakespeare's time to do some extravagant feat as a *proof of their love* in honour of their mistresses, and among others the swallowing of some nauseous potion was the most frequent"—*Singer*.

This fashion is illustrated by a well-known passage in Marston's play, *A Dutch Courtezan* (iv. 1), where a lover tells his mistress how he has "been drunke to her [your] health, swallowed flap-dragons [i.e. burning substances, such as candle-ends, floating in liquor], eate glasses, stabbed arms, and done all the offices of protested gallantry for your sake."

There is another view. According to the usage that prevails in the First Folio, italic type denotes a proper name: hence a suggestion that *Esile*, as the word stands in the Folio, represents the name of some river (e.g. the German *Weissel* = Vistula), and that the question is a poetic exaggeration. But this is very fanciful: there is no river-name resembling *Eisel* which Shakespeare's audiences could reasonably be expected to know. The archaic nature of the word *eisel* accounts for the peculiarities of the printing. Similarly in *Sonnet* 111 it is spelt with a capital E ("Eysell") in the original Quarto.



## POINTS OF ELIZABETHAN DRAMA AND STAGE-HISTORY.

*Hamlet*, II. 2. 318—347.

This is a contemporary allusion. Shakespeare has in mind (and his audience would at once recognise) the following episode in the annals of the Elizabethan stage.

The choristers of the Chapel Royal were accustomed to act; and in 1597 a company of boy-actors known as "the Children of the Chapel," because recruited chiefly from these choristers, were installed at the Blackfriars Theatre, and as they gained experience in acting won great popularity. There is evidence that this popularity was due to the superior quality of the theatre itself (where the prices charged were high), the splendour of the dresses and elaborate stage-equipment, the music and dancing, in which the boy-actors would naturally excel, and some special features, such as the introduction of a masque-episode during the play or a concert before the play. These performances, which might well be described as "private playes<sup>1</sup>," since the "Children" were not on quite the same footing as the ordinary theatrical profession (the "common players"), became (as Rosencrantz is made to say) "the fashion"; so much so, that the regular theatres could not stand the competition, and their companies of actors had to leave London and "travel" in the provinces. The "noueltie<sup>1</sup>" or "innovation," in fact, of this new competition was as disastrous to them as any legal "inhibition," such as the closing of the London theatres, could have been.

And possibly the allusion to their "travelling" corresponds with the experience of Shakespeare's own company of players. There seems to be some reason to think that they "travelled" towards the end of the year 1601, by which time "the Children of the Chapel [i.e. the boy-actors]...had become formidable competitors of the public stage."

Thus much, then, as to the main allusion—the "controversy" between the men-actors and the boy-actors. But there was also a "controversy" connected with it, between two groups of dramatists, and this is glanced at here in *Hamlet*.

"Jealousies in the ranks of the dramatists accentuated the actors' difficulties. Ben Jonson was, at the end of the sixteenth century,

<sup>1</sup> The terms applied to the performances of the Children (cf. II. 2. 327) in the much shorter version of the passage in the first Quarto of *Hamlet* (1603).



engaged in a fierce personal quarrel with two of his fellow dramatists, Marston and Dekker. The adult actors generally avowed sympathy with Jonson's foes. Jonson, by way of revenge, sought an offensive alliance with 'the Children of the Chapel.' Under careful tuition the boys proved capable of performing much the same pieces as the men. To 'the children' Jonson offered in 1600 his comical satire of *Cynthia's Revels*, in which he held up to ridicule Dekker, Marston, and their actor-friends. The play, when acted by 'the children' at the Blackfriars Theatre, was warmly welcomed by the audience. Next year Jonson repeated his manœuvre with greater effect. He learnt that Marston and Dekker were conspiring with the actors of Shakespeare's company to attack him in a piece called *Satiro-Mastix, or the Untrussing of the Humorous Poet*. He anticipated their design by producing, again with 'the Children of the Chapel,' his *Poetaster*, which was throughout a venomous invective against his enemies—dramatists and actors alike. Shakespeare's company retorted by producing Dekker and Marston's *Satiro-Mastix* at the Globe Theatre next year. But Jonson's action had given new life to the vogue of the children. Playgoers took sides in the struggle, and their attention was for a season riveted, to the exclusion of topics more germane to their province, on the actors' and dramatists' boisterous war of personalities"—*Lee*.

This controversy extended from about 1600 to 1604, when Marston was reconciled to Jonson, who also "appears to have had no subsequent dispute with Dekker." Shakespeare had kept clear of it, as may be inferred from an allusion in the prologue to *Troilus and Cressida* and from passages in Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*. Similarly, though he naturally sympathised with the men-actors, his own company having suffered from the competition of the boy-actors, yet he rebuked the indecency of members of the same profession reviling each other for the amusement of the public. By his contemporaries he is always spoken of in terms of affection as "the gentle Shakespeare"—"sweetest Shakespeare" (*L'Allegro*, 133)—but more particularly "the gentle Shakespeare."

*Hamlet*, II. 2. 347 :

"Hercules and his load too."

The Globe Theatre referred to in these words was the one with which Shakespeare was associated from the time of its erection in 1599 till his final retirement to Stratford. He alludes to its circular shape in



*Henry V.* Prol. 1. 13, "this wooden O" (it was built of wood), and in *As You Like It*, II. 7. 139 ("all the world's a stage"), to the motto placed over its entrance, viz. *Totus mundus agit histrionem*, 'every one is a player' (a quotation from the fragments of Petronius Arbiter, a writer of the Silver Age of Latinity, who died A.D. 66).

Shakespeare himself had "a share" (*Hamlet*, III. 2. 265) in the Globe Theatre from 1599 till about 1611, when he had retired to Stratford; also in the Blackfriars Theatre. From the Globe alone Shakespeare must have drawn an income of more than £500 in all, i.e. in his double capacity as actor and part-proprietor—*Lee*.

*Hamlet*, II. 2. 383 :

"scene individable, or poem unlimited."

The so-called "unities" are rules (observed in the Greek drama but not without striking deviations), that the "scene" of the action of a play should not change, and the time in which the events occur should not exceed 24 hours. The only play in which Shakespeare takes these rules into account is *The Tempest*. The time of its action is only 3 hours (about), and the "scene" is always in the Island, though it does change from one part to another.

The third unity is that of action, which ordains that there should be only one theme in a play (as in *Macbeth*), and no underplot (as in almost all Shakespeare's plays).

Freedom in respect of the unities and of the principle that opposite elements may be combined in a play is the real Magna Charta of the Elizabethan romantic drama.

*Hamlet*, II. 2. 383, 384 :

"Seneca cannot be too heavy."

No classical writer had so great an influence on Elizabethan tragedy as the Latin poet Seneca (died A.D. 65). His "Ten Tragedies" (modelled on the Greek style) had been translated into English, and were often acted by students at the "Revels" of the Inns of Court, and before the Queen. The Ghost is a stock-character in Seneca's tragedies. Like Euripides, Seneca is remarkable for his maxims and sententious sayings, many of which are reproduced by the Elizabethan dramatists. The old *Hamlet*-play was no doubt Senecan in style, and we get a survival of it in the moralising element of Shakespeare's Play-scene. It is quite likely that Shakespeare read some of Seneca's works in the original as a schoolboy, the tragedies being a favourite school-book.



*Hamlet*, II. 2. 407—411.

In the Elizabethan public theatres female parts were played by young men or boy-actors, a fact which probably had some bearing on the plots of plays, especially in the use of disguises (e.g. Portia, Rosalind). Cf. *Coriolanus*, II. 2. 100, "When he might act the woman in the scene," and Rosalind's words in the Epilogue to *As You Like It*, "if I were a woman." So in *Antony and Cleopatra*, V. 2. 216—220, where "squeaking" is scornfully applied to a boy's high-pitched treble, i.e. with the same idea as "cry out on the top of question" (*Hamlet*, II. 2. 328). After the restoration the practice of women acting in public (at private entertainments like Masques it had been quite usual) was legalised by a Royal Patent issued in 1662.

*Hamlet*, III. 2. 37—43:

"your clowns etc."

The Clown of the Elizabethan drama descended from the Vice of the Morality-plays. Shakespeare so elevated the conception and part of the Clown in characters like Touchstone (*As You Like It*) and Feste (*Twelfth Night*) that he may be said to have re-created the character. Indeed the name Clown as applied to such characters as those sounds misleading, at least to our ears. Later, he carried the refining process further, and depicted that wonderful, wistful being, the Fool of *King Lear*.

Probably Shakespeare was rebuking gently the actor Kemp, who played all the chief low-comedy parts in Shakespeare's plays, such as Lancelot in *The Merchant of Venice*, Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Touchstone. He is thought to have been rather a conceited man. He may have annoyed Shakespeare by introducing witticisms and comic "business." A passage in the first Quarto of *Hamlet* illustrates the sort of "gag" which these Clowns were too fond of introducing.

The eulogy of the Jester Yorick (V. 1. 177—184) is thought to be meant for the celebrated comedian Richard Tarleton, who died in 1588 (i.e. two years after Shakespeare came up to London from Stratford).



*Hamlet*, III. 2. 95—101:

“you played once i’ the university?”

This refers to the acting of plays, mostly Latin but sometimes English, by the students of Cambridge and Oxford, at Christmas and on great occasions, e.g. the visit of the Sovereign or a foreign prince. Elizabeth, when she visited Cambridge in 1564, saw the *Aulularia* of Plautus and a Latin tragedy of *Dido*. The best known English plays are the *Pilgrimage to Parnassus* (1597—1598), in two parts, and the *Return* (1602), a trilogy acted at St John’s College, Cambridge, at the Christmas revels. Each of these pieces contains most interesting allusions to Shakespeare—“sweet Mr Shakspeare,” as he is twice described in the *Pilgrimage*, Part II.

Shakespeare’s allusion here to the custom of this “playing i’ the university” (i.e. by amateurs) is the more interesting because *Hamlet* (says Mr Lee) is the only drama by Shakespeare known to have been acted in his lifetime at the two Universities. Compare the description of the play on the title-page of the first Quarto: “As it hath beene diuerse timis acted by his Highnesse seruants in the Cittie of London: as also in the two Vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford, and else-where.”

We do not know whether in writing his own play *Julius Cæsar* Shakespeare used any existing play on the same subject, but there were several, as he perhaps hints (*Julius Cæsar*, III. 1. 114—116). One of these was a Latin piece, *Epilogus Cæsaris Interfecti*, performed at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1582; very likely the work alluded to here in *Hamlet*—“I did enact Julius Cæsar.”

## HAMLET’S AGE.

It is part of the Hamlet-puzzle that we cannot say, with any certainty, how old he is supposed to be.

A. The evidence which really weighs most is the character of his speeches. They are not those of a young man. Their qualities of reflection, insight, experience are beyond the scope of youth. They reveal the “formed man”—at any rate, to most students of *Hamlet* and of life.

This impression, due to evidence which we may call internal, is



substantiated by specific evidence external to Hamlet. The Grave-digger says (and people of his status are very precise in such matters, their thoughts being little diverted to affairs outside their own experience) that Hamlet is 30. See V. 1. 135—141, 155, 156. The evidence of these passages is plain beyond dispute. It is confirmed by the succeeding passage (165—184) about Yorick. The jester has been dead “three-and-twenty years,” but Hamlet was old enough to remember him well. What makes this confirmation more striking is the fact that “three-and-twenty years,” the reading of the 2nd Quarto (1604), has been substituted for “this dozen years,” the reading of the 1st Quarto (1603). Clearly Shakespeare meant to confirm the Grave-digger’s “thirty years.” And in the Play-scene “thirty” is the burden of the first speech (III. 2. 144—149) of the King, who stands for Hamlet’s father. Strong evidence, therefore, external to Hamlet, tallies with the strong internal evidence that he is not a young man, still less a youth, but a “formed man”—a man of 30.

*B.* But strong evidence, also external to Hamlet, points to the conclusion we have just rejected, viz. that Hamlet *is* young—“not much past 21.” Thus his youth is specifically mentioned in I. 3. 123; and in two other places (I. 1. 170, and V. 1. 141) he is “young Hamlet,” though in these cases the epithet may be used partly for the sake of distinguishing him from his father. Again, what Laertes says to Ophelia (I. 3) clearly has reference to a young man; cf. especially 5—9. Again, Hamlet is represented as the compeer of men who certainly make the impression of youthfulness. Horatio, Laertes, Fortinbras, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are a group whose average age one would set somewhere between 20 and 25—nearer the latter. Again, Hamlet and Horatio are still students (I. 2. 112, 113, 163), and in Shakespeare’s time the university-course was taken much earlier than it is now. This item, however, must not be pressed without qualification, because it appears that Danish custom differed considerably from the English. Still, the difference would not be known to Shakespeare’s audience, and they would hardly have recognised university-students in men of thirty. Shakespeare would not introduce a detail that added nothing of dramatic or picturesque value and merely tended to confuse.

Lastly, the part of Hamlet’s mother suggests that she is not an elderly woman; nor (as has been cynically remarked) would Hamlet at thirty have been so amazed at her changeableness.

The evidence, then, grouped under the heading “*B*” points to the conclusion “not much past 21,” almost as clearly as the evidence



grouped under the heading "A" demonstrates the "formed man" of 30. Nor can discrepancies of such magnitude be reconciled. It seems best to admit some inconsistency. "Shakespeare at first conceived Hamlet as a youth.... But as Shakespeare worked on at his drama, and came to deposit in Hamlet's mind, as in a treasury, more and more of his own life-wisdom, of his own experience, and of his own keen and virile wit, he saw that early youth was too slight a framework to support his intellectual weight, and gave Hamlet the age of ripening manhood"—*Brandes*.

It may fairly be assumed that the origin of the inconsistency (if inconsistency there be) should be traced to the circumstances of the composition of the play. The Hamlet of Saxo Grammaticus is a "youth," and the Hamlet of the 1st Quarto (1603) is a youth—indeed, to his mother a "boy<sup>1</sup>." Probably the Hamlet of the intermediate work—that old play which Shakespeare made the basis of his tragedy—was a youth; and Shakespeare started with this idea but modified it as the portrait of the prince grew upon the canvas. Moreover, the actual time of a play does not necessarily coincide with the dramatic time-illusion: stress of events often seems to *age* a character (e.g. Macbeth) with a rapidity of effect not credible literally. After all, the inconsistency does not affect the character of Hamlet.

### ADDENDUM<sup>2</sup>.

The reigning monarch of Denmark (and Norway) when Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* was, as we have seen, Christian IV, brother of Anne, wife of James I. A *Life* of Christian IV was published in 1928, and the writer gives grounds for thinking that Shakespeare had Christian and his Court in view. Thus the picture (i. 4. 8—38) of the Bacchanalian revelling of Claudius applies only too well to Christian. Equally apposite is the account (i. 1. 70—79) of the military and naval activities of Denmark. For in the early years of Christian's reign (says this *Life*), "though the royal shipyard on Bremerholmen was generally the busiest place in Copenhagen, extra shifts of carpenters and painters and sail-makers were set to work, so castle and city could hear the blows of axe and hammer both day and night, and the sky above the shipyard was red from the smithies' fires." The King even requisitioned many of the church bells of Copenhagen for the manufacture of "brazen cannon." Again, the political situation of Denmark, especially in regard to Poland, presents notable parallels to that represented in the play.

This theory (quite new, I believe) illustrates further the Danish element, contemporary or "topical," in *Hamlet*. The source of Shakespeare's information has been mentioned (p. xxiii).

<sup>1</sup> Brandes, i. 33. We may note that the important passage v. 1. 155, 156, does not occur in the 1st Quarto. We have seen that the other about Yorick was changed.

<sup>2</sup> Summarized from *The Times Literary Supplement*, Nov. 22, 1928.



## HINTS ON METRE.

### I. Regular Type of Blank Verse.

Blank verse<sup>1</sup> consists of unrhymed lines, each of which, if constructed according to the regular type, contains five feet, each foot being composed of two syllables and having a strong stress or accent on the second syllable, so that each line has five stresses, falling respectively on the even syllables, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10. Here is an example from *Hamlet* (I. 2. 65):

“A lí|tle móre | than kí|n, | and léss | than kí|nd.”

The rhythm of a line like this is a “rising” rhythm.

Blank verse prior to Marlowe, the great Elizabethan dramatist whose work influenced Shakespeare, was modelled strictly on this type. Further, this early blank verse was what is termed “end-stopt”: that is to say, there was almost always *some* pause, however slight, in the sense, and consequently in the rhythm, at the close of each line; while the couplet was normally the limit of the sense. As an example of this “end-stopt,” strictly regular verse, take the following extract from the first play written in blank verse, viz. the tragedy called *Gorboduc* (1561):

“Why should I live and linger forth my time,  
In longer life to double my distress?  
O me most woeful wight! whom no mishap  
Long ere this day could have bereaved hence:  
Mought not these hands by fortune or by fate  
Have pierced this breast, and life with iron reft?”

<sup>1</sup> The metre is sometimes called “iambic pentameter verse,” but this and other terms of Greek prosody, with its symbols, should be avoided, since classical metres, Greek and Latin, are based on a different principle from English prosody. The basis of classical metre is the “quantity” of syllables, and this is represented by the symbols — (long syllable) and ~ (short). The basis of English metre is stress or accent (i.e. the stress laid by the voice on a syllable in pronouncing it); and stress should be represented by the symbols ' (strong stress) and (weak).

If the whole of *Hamlet* were written in verse of this kind the effect, obviously, would be intolerably monotonous. Blank verse before Marlowe *was* intolerably monotonous, and in an especial degree unsuited to the drama, which with its varying situations and moods needs a varied medium of expression more than any other kind of poetry. Marlowe's great service to metre, carried further by Shakespeare, was to introduce variations into the existing type of the blank decasyllabic measure. In fact, analysis of the blank verse of any writer really resolves itself into a study of his modifications of the "end-stopt" regular type.

## II. Shakespeare's Variations of the Regular Type.

The chief variations found in Shakespeare (some of them often combined in the same line) are these:

1. *Weak stresses.* As we read a passage of blank verse our ear tells us that the stresses or accents are not always<sup>1</sup> of the same weight in all the five feet of each line. Thus in the line

"The cán|ker galls | the ín|fants òf | the spríng" (I. 3. 38)  
we feel at once that the stress in the 4th foot is not equal to that which comes in the other feet. A light stress like this is commonly called a "weak stress." Two weak stresses may occur in the same line, but rarely come together. The foot in which a weak stress is least frequent is the first. It is perhaps with prepositions that a weak stress, in any foot, occurs most often. Here are lines with weak stresses:

"And thén | it stárt|ed líke | a guíl|ty thíng  
Upòn | a feár|ful sùm|mons" (I. 1. 148, 149).

"For whát | we knów | múst be | and ís | as cóm(mon)  
As án|y thè | móst vul|gar thíng | to sénse" (I. 2. 98, 99).

"Dó not | for é|ver with | thy vaíl|ed líds  
Seék for | thy nó|ble fáth|er ín | the dúst" (I. 2. 70, 71).

"It fá|ded òn | the crów|ing òf | the cóck" (I. 1. 157).

"Pássing | through ná|ture tò | etér|nity" (I. 2. 73).

"Horá|tio sáys | 'tis bút | our fán|tasy" (I. 1. 23).

<sup>1</sup> Dr Abbott estimates that rather less than one line of three has the full number of five strong stresses, and that about two lines out of three have four strong stresses.



It may not be amiss to remind the young student that in reading a passage of Shakespeare aloud he should be careful to give the weak stresses as weak, i.e. not lay the same emphasis indiscriminately on all the stressed syllables.

2. *Inverted stresses*<sup>1</sup>. The strong stress may fall on the first of the two syllables that form a foot—as the student will have observed in several of the lines quoted above. The following extracts also contain examples:

“Ángels | and mín|istèrs | of gráce | defénd (us)” (I. 4. 39).

“Doóm’d for | a cért|ain térm | to wálk | the níght,  
And fòr | the dáy | confíned | to fást | in fíres” (I. 5. 10, 11).

“O heárt, | lóse not | thy ná|ture; lét | not év(er)  
The soúl | of Né|ro én|ter thís | firm bós(om)”  
(III. 2. 376, 377).

“In é|qual scále | weíghing | delíght | and dóle” (I. 2. 13).

“Taínt not | thy mínd, | nor lét | thy soúl | contríve  
Agáinst | thy móth|er aúght: | leáve her | to heá(ven)”  
(I. 5. 85, 86).

“Tóúching | this dreád|ed síght, | twice seen | of ús” (I. 1. 25).

“Loóks it | not líke | the kíng? | márk it, | Horá(tio)” (I. 1. 43).

Inversion of the stress is most frequent after a pause: hence the foot in which it occurs most often is the first (i.e. after the pause at the end of the preceding line). There may be two inversions in one line, as some of the examples show; but they are seldom consecutive. This shifting of the stress generally *emphasises* a word. It also varies the regular “rising rhythm” of the normal blank verse by a “falling rhythm.”

3. *Extra syllables*. Instead of ten syllables a line may contain eleven or even twelve. An extra syllable, unstressed, may occur at any point in the line, and usually comes before a pause: hence it is commonest in the last foot (the end of a line being the commonest place

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mr Robert Bridges's work, *Milton's Prosody*, pp. 19—21, where Milton's use of inversions is fully analysed and illustrated in a way that helps the study of Shakespeare's inversions.



for a pause), and frequent about the middle of a line (where there is often a break in the sense or rhythm). Compare

"The vér|y pláce | puts tóys | of dés|perá(tion)" (I. 4. 75).

"Nor whát | he spáke, | thóugh it | lack'd fórm | a lít(tle),  
Was nó't | like mád(ness). | There's sóme|thing ln | his soúl"  
(III. 1. 163, 164).

"Her móód | will neéds | be pí(tied). |  
Whát would | she háve?" (IV. 5. 3).

"Bút that | this fól|ly dóúts (it). |  
Let's fól|low, Gér(trude)" (IV. 7. 191).

"And húrt | my bróth(er). |  
I'm sát|isf'd | in ná(ture)" (V. 2. 232).

An extra syllable, unstressed<sup>1</sup>, at the end of a line, as in most of these examples, is variously called a "double ending" and a "feminine ending." The use of the "double ending" becomes increasingly frequent as Shakespeare's blank verse grows more complex. "Double endings" increase<sup>2</sup> from 4 per cent. in *Love's Labour's Lost* to 33 in *The Tempest*, middle plays such as *Henry V.* having a percentage of about 18. The percentage of "double endings" is therefore one of the chief of the metrical tests which help us to fix the date of a play. In fact the use of "double endings" is the commonest of Shakespeare's variations of the normal blank verse. The extra syllable at the end of a line not only gives variety by breaking the regular movement of the ten-syllabled lines, but also, where there is no pause after it, carries on the sense and rhythm to the next line.

Sometimes two extra syllables occur at the end—less commonly, in the middle—of a line. Compare

"My lórd, | I cáme | to sée | your fáth|er's fú(neral)" (I. 2. 175).

"Untò | that él(ement); | but lóng | it cóuld | not bé" (IV. 7. 180).

"O'erbéars | your óf(ficers). | The ráb|ble cáll | him lórd"  
(IV. 5. 85).

"Sprúng from | negléc|ted lóve. | Hów now, | Ophé(lia)"  
(III. 1. 178).

<sup>1</sup> An extra syllable that bears or would naturally bear a stress is rare in Shakespeare. The use of such syllables at the end of a line is a feature of Fletcher's verse, and the frequent occurrence of them in *Henry VIII.* is one of the metrical arguments that he wrote a good deal of that play. Milton has one or two instances in *Comus*; cf. 633, "Bore a bright golden flower, but not in thís (soñ)."

<sup>2</sup> The metrical statistics in these "Hints" are taken from various sources.



"My thought, | whose múr|der yét | is bú | fantás(tical)"  
(*Macbeth*, I. 3. 139).

"That név|er máy | ill óf|fice, òr | fell jeál(ousy)"  
(*Henry V.* v. 2. 391).

This licence is specially frequent with proper names; compare

"I práy | thee, stáy | with ús, | gó not | to Wít(tenberg)"  
(I. 2. 119).

"My Lórd | of Wést|morelánd, | and ún|cle Ēx(eter)"  
(*Henry V.* II. 2. 70).

"My deár | Lord Glós|ter, ànd | my goód | Lord Ēx(eter)"  
(*Henry V.* IV. 3. 9).

The number of lines with two extra syllables increases much in the later plays of Shakespeare. Generally one of the extra syllables admits of some degree of slurring—e.g. (almost) *off'cers* in IV. 5. 85, and *fun'ral* in I. 2. 175.

4. *Unstopt (or Run-on) verse.* The blank verse of Shakespeare's early plays shows clearly the influence of the rhymed couplet which he had used so much in his very earliest work. In his early blank verse the rhyme indeed is gone, but the couplet form remains, with its frequent pause of sense, and consequently of rhythm, at the end of the first line, and its still more frequent stop at the end of the second. Lines of this type mark only the first step in the evolution of blank verse: freedom in the expression of sense and varied rhythm are still absent; and freedom and variety come only when the sense "runs on," without a break, from one line to another.

If at the end of a line there is *any* pause—anything, that is, in the sense or rhythm which involves an actual pause of the voice, however brief—the line is termed "end-stopt." If there is no pause at the end of the line—nothing to prevent the sound overflowing<sup>1</sup> into the next line

<sup>1</sup> The overflow is helped by the use of "light" and "weak" endings to a line. "Light endings" are monosyllables on which "the voice can to a small extent dwell": such as the parts of the auxiliary verbs *be, have, will, shall, can, do*; pronouns like *I, we, thou, you, he, she, they, who, which*, etc.; and conjunctions such as *when, where, while*. "Weak endings" are those monosyllables over which the voice passes with practically no stress at all—e.g. the prepositions *at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to, with*; also *and, but, if, nor, or, than, that*: all words which go very closely with what follows and therefore link the end of one line with the beginning of the next. The use of these endings belongs to the later plays. "Light endings" are first



—it is termed “unstopt” or “run-on.” There is a progressive increase of “unstopt” verse in the plays. The proportion of “unstopt” to “end-stopt” lines is in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* only 1 in 18 (approximately); in *The Winter’s Tale* it is about 1 in 2. The amount, therefore, of “unstopt” verse in a play is another of the metrical tests by which the period of its composition may, to some extent, be inferred. But necessarily it is not a fixed test, since sensibility to sound depends on the individual ear, and even punctuation is an uncertain quantity. Roughly, however, we may say that the sound and the sense go together.

5. *A syllable slurred.* “Provided there be only one accented syllable, there may be more than two syllables in any foot. ‘It is he’ is as much a foot as ‘’tis he’; ‘we will serve’ as ‘we’ll serve’; ‘it is over’ as ‘’tis o’er.’

“Naturally it is among pronouns and the auxiliary verbs [*and prepositions*] that we must look for unemphatic syllables in the Shakespearian verse. Sometimes the unemphatic nature of the syllable is indicated by a contraction in the spelling. Often, however, syllables may be dropped or slurred in sound, although they are expressed to the sight” (Abbott).

This principle that two unstressed syllables may go in the same foot with one stressed syllable is very important, because feet so composed have the rapid, trisyllabic effect which tends much to vary the normal line. This trisyllabic rhythm is a recognised element of English verse<sup>1</sup>, especially in the foot which classical prosody calls an anapæst (— —). Examples are:

“Whereóf | he’s the heáð. | Then íf | he sáys | he lóves (you)”  
(I. 3. 24).

“Of ím|pious stúb|bornnèss; | ’tis unmán|ly griéf” (I. 2. 93).

This rhythm is specially characteristic of the later plays. Compare

“Bút that | the seá, | móunting | to the<sup>2</sup> wél|kin’s chéek”  
(*The Tempest*, I. 2. 4).

numerous (21) in *Macbeth* (1606), and “weak endings” (28) in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1608). Some of the early plays have neither “light endings” nor “weak.” Some have a very few “light endings.” Of “weak endings” no play has more than *two* up till *Antony and Cleopatra*. The proportion of these endings—“light” and “weak”—is therefore another of the metrical tests applied to the later plays (Ingram).

<sup>1</sup> It was “a marked feature of the Old English alliterative verse” (Mayor).

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes in such cases the Folio prints *th*, showing that the word was meant to be slurred (Abbott).



“And hére | was léft | by the saí|lors. Thóú, | my sláve”  
(*The Tempest*, I. 2. 270).

“Hím that | you térm'd, sír, | ‘The goód | old lórd, | Gonzá|lo”  
(*The Tempest*, V. I. 15).

“I’ the lást | night’s stórm | I súch | a fél|low sáw”  
(*King Lear*, IV. I. 34).

6. *Omissions.* After a pause or interruption there is sometimes an omission (*a*) of a stressed or unstressed syllable (oftenest in the first foot), or even (*b*) of a whole foot.

“It is obvious” (says Abbott) “that a syllable or foot may be supplied by a gesture, as beckoning, a movement of the head to listen, or of the hand to demand attention”: or the blank may be accounted for by an interruption, such as the entrance of another character, or by a marked pause or break in the sense. Compare

(*a*) “As hé | would dráw | it. [*Hamlet* “*peruses*”] | Long stáy’d |  
he só” (*Hamlet*, II. I. 91).

“And fálls | on th’ óth|er. [*Enter Lady M.*] | How nów! | what  
néws?” (*Macbeth*, I. 7. 28).

“Flátter|ers! [*Turns to Brutus*] | Now, Brú|tus, thánk | yoursélf”  
(*Julius Cæsar*, V. I. 45).

“Messá|la! [*Messala turns and salutes*] | Whát says | my gén|erál?”  
(*Julius Cæsar*, V. I. 70).

“Whó | comes hére? | The wór|thy tháne | of Róss”  
(*Macbeth*, I. 2. 45).

“Má|ny yeárs | of háp|py dáys | befál” (*Richard II.* I. I. 20).

“Thén | the whí|ning schoól|boy wíth | his sát|chel”  
(*As You Like It*, II. 7. 145).

(*b*) “Must gíve | us paúse. | [*Meditation*] | Thére’s the | respéct”  
(*Hamlet*, III. I. 68).

“He’s tá’en. | [*Shout*] | And, hárk! | they shoút | for jóy”  
(*Julius Cæsar*, V. 3. 32).

7. *Lines of irregular length.* Shakespeare uses lines of three feet often; less frequently, lines of two feet, especially to break the course of some passionate speech; lines of four feet; half-lines occasionally; brief questions, answers and exclamations, which metrically need not



count; and rarely lines with six strong stresses, i.e. Alexandrines<sup>1</sup> (the sonorous type of verse which ends each stanza in *The Faerie Queene*).

As a rule, the use of a short line corresponds with something in the sense, e.g. a break (as at the end of a speech), agitation, conversational effect of question and answer, strong emphasis. Thus agitation is obviously expressed by the metrical breaks in Horatio's apostrophe of the Ghost (I. 1. 129, 132, 135), and passion of varying moods by the pauses in Hamlet's soliloquy (II. 2. 525—565). At the close of a speech a short line gives perhaps greater emphasis, and certainly variety.

There are not a few lines which look somewhat like Alexandrines ("apparent Alexandrines," as Abbott calls them) but which on examination are found not to have six unmistakeable stresses. Thus in many seemingly long lines one syllable or more can be slurred or elided or treated as extra-metrical.

We have already noted several illustrations—I. 2. 94, 119, 175; I. 3. 24; IV. 5. 85; IV. 7. 180, 191; V. 2. 232—and the following may be added.

(a) "Hafl to | your lórd(ship) ! |

I'm glád | to sée | you wéll "

(I. 2. 159).

(b) "But né'er ' th' offénce. | To beár | all smóoth | and é(ven) "

(IV. 3. 7).

(c) "In húb|ger-múb|ger | t' inté (him) : | poór O|phélia "

(IV. 5. 67).

Here in the third foot the unstressed syllable at the end is partially absorbed into the strongly stressed syllable that precedes, and the whole foot illustrates the principle that two unstressed syllables may go in the same foot with one stressed syllable.

(e) "Í'll be | your foíl, | Laér(tes) : | in míne | ígn'rance<sup>2</sup> "

(V. 2. 243).

<sup>1</sup> So called either from Alexandre Paris, an old French poet, or from the *Roman d'Alexandre*, a 12th century poem about Alexander the Great, written in rhymed lines of six feet, in couplets. It is the metre of French tragedy (e.g. of the tragedies of Racine and Corneille).

<sup>2</sup> In this and similar cases the symbol ' is intended to show that a vowel is ignored in the scansion, though heard more or less in pronunciation. There is no means of marking the different degrees of slurring: thus, *ígn'rance* represents with fair accuracy the pronunciation which must be given here, whereas *off'cers* in IV. 5. 85 or *fun'ral* in I. 2. 175 would over-emphasise the slurring sound required there.



Again, some seemingly six-foot lines are really "trimeter couplets": that is, "couplets of two verses of three accents each...often thus printed as two separate short verses in the Folio....Shakespeare seems to have used this metre mostly for rapid dialogue and retort, and in comic and the lighter kind of serious poetry" (Abbott). Generally some notion of division is suggested, e.g. in I. 5. 6, III. 4. 93 (divided between two speakers, as is often the case with the trimeter couplet).

These, then, are the chief modes by which Shakespeare diversifies the structure of regular blank verse. Their general result has been well summed up thus: they make the effect of Shakespeare's maturer blank verse rather rhythmical than rigidly metrical, i.e. more a matter of stresses distributed with endless variety than of syllables calculated and accented according to a normal standard; and there is a progressive development in the trisyllabic direction. Every student should grasp these variations thoroughly, particularly the first five, and observe the illustrations of them that occur in any play (especially the later plays) that he may be studying.

And he must, of course, remember that scansion depends much on the way in which a writer abbreviates or lengthens sounds, as the metre requires.

Abbreviation comprises all the cases in which a syllable does not count metrically—whether it be elided<sup>1</sup>, or slurred. Many abbreviations belong to everyday speech, others to poetical usage.

Of lengthening of sounds the most important example is the scansion of a monosyllable as two syllables<sup>2</sup>.

For full details the student must refer to the standard authority, viz. Dr Abbott's *Shakespearian Grammar*, pp. 344—387.

### III. Shakespeare's use of Rhyme.

In his early plays Shakespeare uses the rhymed couplet<sup>3</sup> very largely; but gradually the amount of rhyme declines, so that the proportion of rhymed couplets in a piece is one of the surest indications of the period to which it belongs.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the common elision of *the* before a vowel.

<sup>2</sup> Abbott gives the following instances in *Hamlet*: *where* (I. 2. 85); *sweet* (I. 3. 8); *ay* (II. 1. 31; IV. 7. 59); *fear* (III. 4. 7); *word* (III. 4. 179); *straight* (IV. 4. 31); *O* (IV. 4. 65).

<sup>3</sup> I.e. of five feet in each line; cf. I. 5. 189, 190.



Is there much rhyme? the play is early.

Is there little rhyme? the play is late.

"In *Love's Labour's Lost* there are about two rhymed lines to every one of blank verse. In *The Comedy of Errors* there are 380 rhymed lines to 1150 unrhymed. In *The Tempest* two rhymed lines occur; in *The Winter's Tale* not one" (Dowden).

In applying the rhyme test we must exclude the cases where there is a special reason for the use of rhyme—as in the Witches-scenes of *Macbeth*. Thus the rhyme of the Masque in Act IV. of *The Tempest* has no bearing whatsoever on the date of the play, because Masques were usually written in rhymed measures. Similarly all songs such as we get in *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, and *The Winter's Tale* must, of course, be excluded. Again, the Play-scene in *Hamlet* (III. 2) is designedly written in the manner of the old-fashioned rhymed tragedy.

Let us consider for a moment the reasons which led Shakespeare to adopt blank verse and gradually abandon rhyme.

As a medium of dramatic expression blank verse, of the varied Shakespearian type, has three points of superiority over rhyme:

1. *Naturalness*. Rhyme is artificial. It reminds us, therefore,—perhaps I should say, never lets us forget—that the play is a play, fiction and not reality, because in real life people do not converse in rhyme. Especially in moments of great emotion does rhyme destroy the illusion of reality: we cannot conceive of Lear raving at Goneril in rhymed couplets. Blank verse on the other hand has something of the naturalness of conversation, and naturalness is a very great help towards making fiction appear like truth.

2. *Freedom*. The necessity of rhyming imposes restraint upon a writer such as blank verse obviously does not involve, and often forces him to invert the order of words or even to use a less suitable word. The rhythm too of the rhymed couplet tends strongly to confine the sense within the limits of the couplet, whereas in the blank verse of a skilful writer the sense "runs on" easily from line to line. In fact, in the rhymed couplet the verse is apt to dominate the sense; while in blank verse the sense finds unfettered expression. And so blank verse has not only something of the naturalness but also something of the freedom of conversation.

3. *Variety*. In a paragraph of rhymed couplets the pauses in the sense and therefore in the rhythm are monotonous. We constantly have a pause at the end of the first line and almost always a pause at



the end of the second. With the uniformity of a passage composed in this form contrast the varied rhythms of such blank verse as that of *The Tempest*, where the pauses are distributed with ever-changing diversity of cadence.

Again, the rhyme of a long narrative poem when read, or of a short lyric when recited, has a pleasing effect; but in a long spell of spoken verse I think that the sound of rhyme, though at first agreeable to it, gradually tires the ear.

These considerations on the comparative merits of rhymed and unrhymed verse on the stage should be tested by careful reference to the Play-scene in *Hamlet* (III. 2).

What rhyme we do get in Shakespeare's later plays is mainly at the end of a scene, when it serves to indicate the conclusion, and (less commonly) at the close of a long speech, when it forms a kind of climax. As to the former use (cf. I. 5. 189, 190) Dr Abbott says: "Rhyme was often used as an effective termination at the end of the scene. When the scenery<sup>1</sup> was not changed, or the arrangements were so defective that the change was not easily perceptible, it was, perhaps, additionally desirable to mark that a scene was finished."

And just as rhyme often marks the close of a scene so it sometimes marks the close of a chapter in a man's career, and suggests farewell. A striking example of this use of rhyme occurs in *As You Like It*, II. 3. 67—76, where old Adam and Orlando, about to set forth on their expedition, severally bid farewell to their former life. Similarly in *Richard II.* II. 2. 142—149, the rhyme expresses the feeling of the King's favourites that their period of prosperity is over and they are parting for ever; while in V. 5. 110—119, it emphasises the tragedy of the close of Richard's life. Again, in *King Lear* (a comparatively late play, 1605—1606) the banished Kent is made to use rhyme in his leave-taking (I. 1. 183—190).

One other noticeable purpose of rhyme is found in plays as late as *Othello* (about 1604) and *Lear*, viz. to express moralising reflections on life and give them a sententious, epigrammatic effect. Dowden instances *Othello*, I. 3. 202—219, and II. 1. 149—161. This use of rhyme is natural because proverbial wisdom so often takes a rhymed form. Maxims stick better in the memory when they are rhymed.

<sup>1</sup> There was no moveable scenery; the only outward indication of the locality intended was some stage 'property'—e.g. "a bed to signify a bed-chamber; a table with pens upon it to signify a counting-house; or a board bearing in large letters the name of the place"—Dowden.



#### IV. Shakespeare's use<sup>1</sup> of Prose.

The chief use to which Shakespeare puts prose is as a conversational medium of expression. He introduces it where he wishes "to lower the dramatic pitch," and does not desire a poetical effect: where, in fact, he wants to convey the impression of people talking together. This use is illustrated so fully in *Hamlet* that it is needless to particularise. Attention, however, may be drawn to the interesting transitions from prose to verse and verse to prose in the same scene, e.g. in II. 2; III. 2; V. 1; V. 2. These alternations are very suggestive as indications of change of mood or circumstances, and the motive in each case should be carefully considered. It should be observed too how characters conceived in a wholly tragic spirit speak only in verse; while prose may be used to convey an impression of unreality where a character is dealing in a trifling or assumed manner with some serious emotion. Hence in the great tragedies like *Hamlet*, "the normal form of expression is verse. Prose is here used only for special reasons."

The use of prose next in importance is for comic parts and the speech of comic characters like the "Clowns" of the comedies, e.g. Touchstone in *As You Like It*, who never drops into blank verse. Indeed, in this and the other comedies of Shakespeare's middle period, prose becomes practically "the language of comedy," its natural means of expression. *Much Ado About Nothing* is really "a prose comedy."

Prose is commonly assigned to characters of humble position, e.g. servants, sailors (IV. 6) and soldiers like Bates, Court and Williams in *Henry V.* It is the normal medium in scenes of "low life," such as the Grave-diggers' scene in *Hamlet* (V. 1). Thus in *Henry V.* the Hostess, Bardolph, Nym and the Boy speak wholly in prose as being at once humorous (three of them unintentionally) and of humble status; and the same remark applies to the Grave-diggers, whom the stage-directions describe as "clowns."

Other minor uses of prose by Shakespeare are for letters (IV. 6), proclamations, documents, etc., and occasionally (as though even blank verse were too artificial) for the expression of extreme emotion and

<sup>1</sup> Strictly, it does not come under the heading "metre"; but it is convenient to treat the subject here. See Abbott, p. 429; also *The Age of Shakespeare*, II. pp. 117—122.



mental derangement. Compare Ophelia in the mad-scene, IV. 5, and *Lear*, III. 4 ; similarly Hamlet and Edgar (*Lear*, III. 4, IV. 1) are both made to use prose when they are feigning insanity.

In one of the most remarkable passages in *Hamlet* ("this goodly frame...the paragon of animals," II. 2. 290—298) the prose is not specially introduced to express a particular tone of thought or emotion : it merely continues the *form* of the preceding dialogue, for the sake of general harmony of effect, but breathes into that form the spirit of the loftiest imaginative ardour. The passage, indeed, like many in the Bible, is a signal illustration of the poetical resources of prose.

It has been noted that Hamlet invariably uses prose in speaking to Ophelia and Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Bitterness and contempt, irony and wit, and abruptness of thought or feeling, find vent more naturally and pointedly in prose than in blank verse.

Shakespeare's use of prose increases as the character of his plays grows more varied and complex. *Richard II.*, written five or six years before *Henry V.*, has no prose. The amount of prose in a play therefore is an indication of its date, like the amount of rhyme, though not so conclusive an indication.

## I. INDEX OF WORDS AND PHRASES.

*This List applies to the Notes only ; words of which longer explanations are given will be found in the Glossary. The references are to the pages.*

### *Abbreviations :—*

adj. = adjective.

intr. = intransitive.

n. = noun.

vb = verb.

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